

**COMMENTS RE: FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN  
RECEIVED VIA EMAIL**

Dear School Committee members,

I am unable to make the meeting shown in the attached document, but I wanted to let you know that I support moving to a full-day kindergarten program. As the parent of a 1st and 3rd grader, I wish this program was already in place. I support full-day programs because the vast majority of academic studies have shown benefits from a full-day Kindergarten. On a personal level I support it because it would significantly help the childcare scheduling for families where all parents work.

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We are writing in response to your recent letter to families indicating the proposal to shift the current hybrid kindergarten schedule to full day kindergarten. We are strongly opposed to this switch and hope that the current hybrid schedule will continue. Our first child finished kindergarten last spring, and our second child will enter kindergarten in September 2013, so we care deeply about this issue. Our daughter attended kindergarten at Hunnewell last year and we found the hybrid schedule outstanding for her developmental readiness. Moreover, we saw the benefit in the smaller class size on her stay-day afternoons, and the important opportunities in that environment for more personal and interactive teaching and learning.

We understand that the hybrid schedule can be a challenge for parents, but not once last year in numerous conversations with other kindergarten parents did we hear any grumbling about the need for full day kindergarten, either for scheduling or pedagogical reasons.

In speaking with friends professionally involved in early elementary education, and in our own informal research on early childhood education, we have heard repeatedly about the benefits of this kind of hybrid schedule, and its developmental appropriateness for this age group—the benefits of smaller classroom groups in the afternoons, a less intense school week, and the resulting possibility for unstructured free play and family time on some days. Our daughter had a fantastic year in kindergarten, and we have little doubt that was due in large part to an outstanding teacher empowered by the right balance of time and curriculum.

We hope you will seriously consider maintaining the current hybrid schedule for kindergarten, and that our son will get to benefit from this program.

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I cannot make the meeting on full day k but fully support it. My son is a few years away but it would be great for us. He would otherwise be in WCCC full time. Best,

**Fiske Parent**

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I will not be able to attend the forum, but I would like to contribute one additional point to consider. First - thanks to all who are acknowledging that the hybrid model is logistically difficult - this is especially true for working moms.

Second, if the School Department does decide to stay with the hybrid model, please think through how the after-school program will support it. When my son was in kindergarten, Upham (with almost no warning) moved the after-school program to the high school, leaving me in a position where I had to pick up my daughter at Upham at the exact same time that I needed to pick up my son at WHS. The program made it clear that lateness on my part would not be tolerated. The solution, I was told, was to have a nanny help me.

I am sure whatever is decided will be well thought out and best for all, but I wanted to make sure all angles were on the table. Thanks, and good luck!

**(mother of two current WHS students)**

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Hello Dr. Wong,

I am writing to express my concern over the proposed plan to switch to full day kindergarten.

Would you mind sending me the research citations that concern this change? I would like to become as informed as possible before the November 16th meeting.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

**Hunnewell Parent**

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Dear Superintendent Wong and Principal Boris-Schacter,

We are writing to you today to strongly support the full-day kindergarten proposal for Wellesley's Elementary Schools.

My wife, and I have two daughters. Our eldest daughter, was in Ms. McFarlane's Kindergarten class last year. Our younger daughter, will start Kindergarten at Hunnewell in two years.

Our daughter absolutely loved Kindergarten, and thrived in Ms. McFarlane's class. Under Ms. McFarlane's tutelage, we saw marked advancements in reading, writing, mathematical and social skills last year. In addition, our daughter found Kindergarten to be a treat – she loved to go in the morning, and hated to leave at the end of the day. In our view, the more time that our daughter spent in Ms. McFarlane's class, the better!

Both my wife and I are professionals who work full-time. As such, the hybrid model was less than ideal for us. We need full-day care for both of our children. Our solution to the hybrid approach was to enroll our daughter in the WCCC after-school program. Yet, we often felt a tension between families with two working parents (such as ours) and families where at least one person stayed at home full time. We completely agree with your statements in the Boston Globe that, "I feel that right now, with the hybrid model, the off-day experience is inequitable among our kids...There are some kids with families that can provide a really rich off-day experience. And some families can't. So I feel like our kids aren't coming in with the same experience in first grade."

Some parents have expressed concern that full-day kindergarten would be too much for their children. I cannot speak about their children. Nevertheless, both of our kids have been in day care, preschool, public school, and after-school programs from roughly 8:30 A.M. until 5:45 P.M. five days a week since they were each 3 months old. They seem to be surviving just fine.

Finally, neither I nor my wife are Kindergarten teachers, but we respect the opinions of those who are. As such, we'd give a great deal of deference to the opinions of Donna McFarlane, and the other Kindergarten teachers in the district.

Once again, we strongly support your proposal for full-day Kindergarten. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this further, please let us know.

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November 7, 2011

Dear Bella,

I am writing to provide input for the discussion on the proposed changes to the kindergarten schedule. As background, I am a parent of a Hardy School 4<sup>th</sup> grader and a Wellesley Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> grader, both of whom went through the current "hybrid" schedule when they were in kindergarten at Hardy School. While the proposed changes will not impact my children, I write with the perspective of a parent that has experience with the current system.

My husband and I are working parents. We have lived, and understand the challenges of managing the varying school schedules with relatively inflexible work schedules. It's not easy. With that said, I am a very strong supporter of the hybrid kindergarten program and would like to see it continue. Here are the reasons:

- Small group settings with the teachers on the “stay days” from September through April are unique and invaluable. Focusing on individual development with only 10 or 11 children in the class provides a wonderful opportunity for the teachers to connect with the children and work with their specific needs. The children develop a bond with their kindergarten teacher that is unmatched later in their school years.
- The step wise integration into a full day schedule (added day in September, October and 2 more in April) helps build an understanding for the long term (first grade and beyond) school schedule, while still letting our five year olds have time to be kids and play during the day. Let's keep them balanced, rested and loving school at this early age.
- Quality afterschool care is available and helps parents flex with the kids schedules. We have nothing but great things to say about the WCCC staff that works in cooperation with the Wellesley Public schools. Their kindergarten program was age appropriate and introduced our two children to others around Wellesley. My 8<sup>th</sup> grade daughter has friendships that maintained from kindergarten afterschool to middle school and made her transition to middle school easier by knowing others from different elementary schools.
- Some students aren't ready for a more intense curriculum at age 5. As we are challenged with questions posed by thought provoking movies like “Race to Nowhere”, what are we hoping to gain by requiring 5 year olds to sit in a classroom for 7 hours a day, instead of playing outside more and being children?

I strongly value that my children were able to experience the hybrid approach to kindergarten in Wellesley and hope that the needs of kids are carefully thought out as the School Department considers moving toward a full day kindergarten model.

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Dear Ms. Wong,

I had the opportunity to attend last night's meeting about full day Kindergarten. I would like to voice my full support for the full day program. Despite the anecdotal experience provided by the Newton Kindergarten teacher, all of the evidence I read in preparation for last night's meeting provided support for the change. Whether the information comes from Mass 2020, Center for American Progress, or studies like the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fnces.ed.gov%2Fpubs2004%2F2004078.pdf>) all make clear that more time in school is better. I would agree that the data concerning hybrid programs compared with full day is limited, but that is because the model is infrequent across the US and because it forms a middle ground between half day and full day, thus making the differences smaller and harder to demonstrate. But this makes the case clearer in my mind: why is hybrid better than half day? Because the kids have more time in school, developing their skill sets.

In short, recognizing the funding issues, my family strongly supports this change.

With best wishes,

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Dear Wellesley School Administrators and School Committee members,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed switch to full day kindergarten. I am in favor of the hybrid model that Wellesley currently implements because it provides small group settings that decrease the student/teacher ratio. These small groups promote early

literacy by allowing teachers to get to know the needs of each child at the start of the school year. Students can also be more easily assessed by teachers and placed in appropriate reading groups. Small classes are also invaluable for teachers to adapt and modify lessons for individual children's literacy needs.

The cited research that supports a full day model being positive for children might be valid in certain situations. However, the research compares half-day kindergarten programs (meeting 2.5-3 hours per day) and full-day programs. We are fortunate in Wellesley that we have a hybrid model where students end the year in full-day kindergarten. There is no research to my knowledge that compares the merits of our hybrid model to the full-day option. It is unfair to use research that doesn't pertain to our current model here in Wellesley. Perhaps a better way to explore this switch is to ask our very own kindergarten teaching staff.

The brief also mentions that the current kindergarten model is difficult for parent schedules. Our school system should not be in the business of childcare, but rather it must serve the educational needs of students. Also if there is a desire to be more accommodating to parent schedules, I would ask the school committee and superintendant to reconsider the half days on Wednesday for elementary aged children in Wellesley. This scheduling anomaly is a struggle for all parents, not just parents of kindergarteners.

In addition, the recent news of Dr. Wong's resignation makes planning for this change more challenging. A major curriculum modification might not be best implemented during a key administrative change such as this one.

Finally, in a time where there is a budget shortfall, I am troubled that a proposal is being considered that would necessitate an increased appropriation of funds. Especially when the research supporting this proposal is not directly applicable to Wellesley. I look forward to discussing this further at Wednesday's meeting.

Thank you,

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Dear Dr. Wong,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed switch to full day kindergarten. Wellesley's wonderfully unique hybrid model provides small group learning and an amazing student/teacher ratio which under the new model would disappear. These small groups promote early literacy by allowing teachers to understand the needs of each child at the start of the school year. Students can also be more easily assessed by teachers and placed in appropriate reading groups. Small classes are also invaluable for teachers to adapt and modify lessons for individual children's literacy needs.

The cited research that supports a full day model being positive for children might be valid in certain situations. However, the research compares half-day kindergarten programs (meeting 2.5-3 hours per day) and full-day programs. We are fortunate in Wellesley that we have a hybrid model where the kids end the year in full-day kindergarten. There is no research to my knowledge that compares the merits of our hybrid model to the full-day option. It is unfair to use research that doesn't pertain to our current Wellesley model. Perhaps a better way to explore this switch is to ask the opinion of the kindergarten teaching staff and also establish a task force to further research the various models.

The brief also mentions that the current kindergarten model is difficult for parent schedules. Our school system should place a higher priority on parent schedules, but rather serve the educational needs of students to the best of its ability. If there is a desire to be more accommodating to parent schedules, I would ask that you reconsider the half days on Wednesday for elementary children in Wellesley. This scheduling anomaly is a struggle for all parents, not just parents of kindergarteners. And, half days on Wednesdays are an issue throughout elementary school.

Finally, in a time where there is a budget shortfall, I am troubled that a proposal is being considered that would necessitate an increased appropriation of funds to change the hybrid model which seems to be working. Especially when the research supporting this proposal is not directly applicable to Wellesley. And, if you are discussing an increase in appropriation of funds,

then perhaps a task force should completely examine what is missing in the elementary education.

I believe that you and the school committee would be making a terrible decision by taking away our unique model. I am not opposed to change in a system, if the change makes sense. Currently, I do not see valid reasons for this kindergarten policy to change.

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Dear Dr. Wong,

I unfortunately could not attend the meeting the other night; however, wanted to share my concerns about the proposed change to the kindergarten model. We currently have our second child going through the hybrid system and will have two more attending over the next two years. When we moved here from Charlotte, I thought that the hybrid system was both inconvenient and did not give the students the benefit of more hours in classroom. Over the past three years though I have come to appreciate the many benefits of the hybrid system and would be sorry if our other two children did not receive the same opportunity. The unique hybrid model provides small group learning and an amazing student/teacher ratio which under the new model would no longer exist. There would be fewer opportunities for the small group attention which I believe is such a benefit at the early stages of early reading.

The cited research that supports a full day model being positive for children might be valid in certain situations and in certain demographics. However, the research compares half-day kindergarten programs (meeting 2.5-3 hours per day) and full-day programs. We are fortunate in Wellesley that we have a hybrid model where the kids end the year in full-day kindergarten. I am unaware of any studies on the current hybrid model. Perhaps a better way to explore this switch is to ask the opinion of the kindergarten teaching staff and also establish a task force to further research the various models.

Again, when we moved here I thought that the hybrid model was inconvenient. I readily admit that I stay at home and therefore am not as affected by this; but I do think that that particular argument doesn't hold much weight as the entire elementary school program gets out early on Wednesday. I also think there are other options; what about doing two stay days like they do now until after the holiday break instead of waiting until April? It would still provide many opportunities for specialists throughout the year and give them the initial lower student/teacher ratio for a foundation.

As educators, I am sure that providing the best education is of the utmost importance. I do think though that there are several things lacking from the current curriculum that would be better served if changed first, before changing the hybrid system. With all of the budget conversations going on, it highlights the fact that there needs to be a plan in place of where we want our students/school system to be in the future vs. handling issues as individual decisions.

I believe that you and the school committee would be making a terrible decision by taking away our unique model. I am not opposed to change in a system, if the change makes sense. Currently, I do not see valid reasons for this kindergarten policy to change.

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Dear Ms. Wong and School Committee Members:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the possible switch from a hybrid kindergarten schedule to full-day kindergarten. I'd like to start by saying that I am rather shocked that you are proposing that such a significant change take place this coming fall. By the time a final decision is made, it will be too late for those of us with incoming kindergartners to make alternate plans if a change is made that we do not support. In fact, it is already too late to make alternate plans, as pre-K programs are already well into their admissions processes. This is especially a concern for parents, such as myself, who have children who will be on the younger side when they start kindergarten and who may not have the same stamina as older children to withstand a full-day schedule. As you know, many people with such younger children choose to defer their kindergarten start, even under the hybrid model. A switch to a full-day kindergarten will lead to even more parents considering a deferred start. Parents have relied upon the fact that Wellesley

has been a hybrid model for years while making the important decision of when to have their children start kindergarten, and for you to make such a material change to the program at this point, without giving sufficient notice of the change to those of us who will be immediately affected, is patently unfair. I do not believe the proposal should be adopted at all, and certainly not to take effect this coming fall.

I am strongly in favor of the current hybrid model because I find the small group settings during stay days invaluable. The children really thrive in these smaller settings, with more one-on-one time with the teachers. This is when they do a lot of the more academic learning, which is clearly easier to do when the teacher is better able to focus on a smaller group of students. Teachers are better able to adapt their lessons so as to meet each child's needs in these smaller settings. Children are better able to get the attention they need while discovering how to learn in a new, more academic setting. I feel that the quality of the time the children spend learning at school is more important than the quantity of time per week they spend there. And the time spent in these smaller group settings is of greater academic quality in my opinion. In addition, I believe that the full-time schedule would be completely exhausting for many kindergartners. My son, who is currently in kindergarten, is already exhausted at the end of stay days, and completely exhausted by the end of the week. I cannot imagine how he would be if he had a full-time schedule at this point. He has always LOVED school and done very well at each program he has been enrolled in, but many times now he tells me he does not like stay days because they are too long. I believe he works very hard while he is at school, especially during the more focused learning time during his stay days, and he is just mentally maxed out by the end of the week. Kindergarten is much more demanding on these young children than most preschool programs – not just in terms of the amount of time spent in a classroom, but in terms of the manner of learning in a more formal, academic setting. It is a huge adjustment coming from a play-based preschool to a more formal academic setting. I love the way the current schedule eases kindergartners into this transition.

I also have to say that I was surprised that the matter of after-school childcare scheduling is a factor in your decision. A decision regarding curriculum should absolutely be based on what is the best for our children academically, not what happens to be more convenient for certain families' schedules. Again, the focus should not be on the quantity of time our children are in school per week, but on the quality. That you would suggest that additional time spent in school could just replace time spent with a babysitter or in daycare is troubling – I would hope that our schools are more than just a place to park children while parents are working.

Finally, I think that given the recent resignation of Ms. Wong, and the other challenges that the Wellesley school system is facing at the moment, that this is not the appropriate time to focus on such a material change to the curriculum and is best tabled at this point. In addition, if this does turn out to be a budget override year, I will definitely not vote in favor of an override if it includes a full-day kindergarten schedule.

Thank you in advance for giving serious consideration to my concerns. I think the Wellesley school system is very special and unique – one of the main reasons why my family chose to move to Wellesley and enroll in public schools, and it would be a shame to see it changed in such a material way.

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Dear Superintendent Wong,

We are the parents of a present kindergartner at Sprague, in Mrs. Bender's class, and one future kindergartner (now 2 years old). Thank you for hosting the meeting regarding Full Day Kindergarten on November 16. We also appreciate that all of the principals were there in support. That seems to be a very strong statement in favor of the plan. There seem to be solid

reasons for moving to full-day kindergarten, as you articulated. We apologize that we were unable to submit this letter sooner.

We were quite surprised when shortly after moving here we found out that Wellesley did not have full-day kindergarten. We had assumed that it was the norm now. As parents, we are unequivocally in favor of the plan (but we recognize that there are financial, teacher training and other considerations as well). We felt that at the meeting you may have gotten a skewed view that most parents are against the plan based on the opinions of a vocal group.

Here are some of our reasons in support of the plan:

-By the kindergarten age, most children seem ready to spend the full day in school. Maybe our view is biased because our child has absolutely taken to kindergarten and loves Sprague in every way. She does have school experience from day care, so a half day just feels very short to her. Both of our children will also be "older" in their classes as they have fall birthdays, so we feel they absolutely are/will be ready for full day. We feel the short days actually shortchange the children that are ready for the longer days.

-In the big picture, 2 full days/week does not seem like enough. On Friday our daughter has a short day when she gets picked up at 12 and in that time it is hard for me to accomplish much; I imagine it is very difficult to do substantive work in that short time frame. WCCC After School, which she attends 2 days a week, is a good program that the children enjoy but is not oriented toward a progressive curriculum in the same way as the classroom.

-We have no doubt that the teachers can implement the curriculum and work effectively toward development goals much better than we can supplement their work at home. We spend time reading, counting, adding, etc. but not with the same experience, techniques and insight as a professional teacher. Mrs. Bender is absolutely wonderful and the other kindergarten teachers at Sprague seem equally dedicated.

-A full day schedule allows increased flexibility in scheduling specials, and therefore classroom time. I know the children often feel rushed in the mornings as they move from activity to activity.

-Since kindergartners do not get homework, there is still plenty of time for extracurricular music lessons or the like after school.

-Consistency in the daily schedule would be helpful, especially for working parents. Although WCCC is a satisfactory option right now, our children are bussed around to different schools (which is somewhat concerning and also inconvenient for pick-ups) and we pay out of pocket for the program. Finding a nanny is in fact very difficult with this schedule and we ended up putting our son in day care full-time this fall because I could not readily find a nanny who could accommodate our schedule. After having chosen a day care close to Sprague, I find myself driving to Schofield, which is effectively on the other side of town, twice a week to pick up our daughter from WCCC After School and then making my way to the day care.

- We respect the opinions of the highly qualified principals and other professionals in the system that Wellesley has hired for their professional expertise.

There are some concerns as well, but they are outweighed by the expected benefits:

-It is fair to ask whether the hybrid model is more satisfying for teachers and students than a full-day program. The teachers probably also benefit from small group time with the children, as do the children in having both that learning experience and that personal connection with their teachers.

-Having a teaching assistant in every classroom seems critical to making this successful. Therefore, this plan should be contingent on that requirement.

Statements in favor of the hybrid plan at the meeting seemed driven primarily by fear of change. The only argument in favor of the plan that made logical sense is that the children would lose some small group and/or one-one-one time with their teacher. It is not clear why some parents felt it would be a huge and rushed adjustment for them and the children (requiring more than the allotted 3 months from May-August to process and accept), as the children will actually have more time in school, not less and therefore need fewer outside childcare arrangements and activities planned for them, and children don't know anything different than what they experience. Many of the parents demanded "evidence" that full-day is better than

hybrid. However, is there “evidence” that hybrid is better than full-day? Our view is that we can bring reason and common sense to bear as well; not everything requires evidence because some things are self-evident.

As we noted, we are writing this letter as parents. Accordingly, costs and other administrative considerations are not weighed here, and they certainly should be factored into the final decision. We are open to talking at any time, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Dear Dr. Wong,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed switch to full day kindergarten. I am in favor of the hybrid model that Wellesley currently implements because it provides small group settings that decrease the student/teacher ratio. These small groups promote early literacy by allowing teachers to get to know the needs of each child at the start of the school year. Students can also be more easily assessed by teachers and placed in appropriate reading groups. Small classes are also invaluable for teachers to adapt and modify lessons for individual children’s literacy needs. In addition, trading two days of the small group setting for four days of a large group setting does not seem like a trade that will offer students more quality time on learning. Lastly, even with another adult in the classroom, a Kindergarten class with a larger class size is certainly not desirable compared to the small class size which the hybrid model offers.

The cited research compares half-day Kindergarten to full-day Kindergarten. We are very lucky to have a hybrid model in Wellesley. There is not research to my knowledge that compares our hybrid model to that of a full-day model.

Five and six year old children who are in Kindergarten may also have a difficult time sustaining four full days a week of school. In speaking with parents around the community, the weeks after April vacation where Kindergarten changes to a full day schedule can be very difficult for the children. Increased time on learning does not mean quality time on learning. The hybrid model provides children with two full days a week of quality small group instruction.

The hybrid model also provides students with the opportunity to get to know their peers and manage social interactions in a small group setting. This is beneficial for any student, but especially for Kindergarteners who are new to the school and to most of their peers.

Finally, in a time where there is a budget shortfall, I am troubled that a proposal is being considered that would necessitate an increased appropriation of funds. Especially when the research supporting this proposal is not directly applicable to Wellesley.

Respectfully,

(parent of a K student, fall 2012)

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Dear Ms. Wong:

I’m writing to **urge you to switch the Kindergarten program in Wellesley to full-day** for the 2012-2013 school year. My youngest son will be in K at Schofield next year. He is currently attending full-day pre-school and has been for 2+ years. He is used to the flow of full day and would be taking a step backwards going to the hybrid model. Why are we limiting the depth and breadth of our Kindergarten education? Why are we short-changing our students? The trade-off will pay dividends as these children progress through the Wellesley schools.

Thank You.

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Dear Ms. Littlefield,

I read with interest today the report in the Patch concerning the possible transition to full day Kindergarten in the Wellesley school system. I was dismayed to learn that the decision will be made in the “Wellesley Way.” The idea that “Sometimes things take time to be done in the Wellesley way,” she said, which is to form a committee, build a consensus and “move forward in a way that is best for the children,” suggests that opinion may supersede evidence in determining the best way forward for our children. The committee may view the process as evolutionary, but for every kindergarten class the change is zero sum: either there is or is not a change. The

Rand Study and Early Education Studies suggest that more time in school is better. These findings are bolstered by the support of every Wellesley elementary school principal, the elementary coordinator, and the superintendent of our school district. I would very much like to understand why you would defer to laymen without any expertise or knowledge of the research when making the determination. I would ask that you make clear the specific criteria that will be used in making this decision.

If the Committee seeks to pursue the stated goals of the school system, then academic excellence, its top goal, will be clearly supported by making this change.

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Superintendent Wong:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and we are residents in Wellesley with three children, (5), (4) and (2) who will all be going through the Bates school system. Our kids are currently in the pre-school and pre-kindergarten programs at St John's in Wellesley and we have been eagerly waiting to transfer them to the Wellesley public school system. In fact, the Wellesley school system was our primary reason for moving to this great town from Hopkinton. We are true supporters of the public school system and looking forward to giving our children a wonderful education here in Wellesley.

We wanted to send you a note in full support of having a full day kindergarten program. While I realize that this is a tough economy and there are so many factors involved, it is such an important school year that transitions kids into their academic environment and also is the start of the building of their education. For our kids, we have two who missed the school cut-off since they both have birthdays in September (09/09/06 and 09/09/09). They will have essentially done three years of pre-school prior to kindergarten and will be 6 when starting kindergarten. These children are ready to be in a learning environment for social and academic reasons and it seems like a step back to put them into school for half of a day where it does not allow for the time to get to school, set up, get acclimated and then start lessons.

This is such a great school system and town and we need to make sure that the kindergarten program is representative of this and meeting the needs of the children and keeping them engaged and interested from the on-set. We are in full support of a full day program and hope that the town and those involved will take the time to make the right decision.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the Wellesley schools,

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To whom it may concern:

We believe that full day kindergarten is the best for our children. The studies prove that the children benefit from the full day curriculum. Please strongly consider making this change to the Wellesley school system.

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I am writing in support of a potential shift to full day kindergarten for the 2012-2013 school year. We currently have two children at Hardy. Neither attended kindergarten there because the hybrid schedule was incompatible with our two-working-parent family. We would love to send \_\_\_ to kindergarten next year if you went to a full day schedule, and he would then be probably better prepared for 1st grade. If not, \_\_\_ will come to Hardy in the first grade like his sisters and spend his kindergarten year at his full day program at the Wellesley Montessori School.

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Dear Ms. Wong,

Thank you for sharing your proposal for full day kindergarten with members of the community last week. You opened with a sentiment that I certainly share - Kindergarten is a special year. It's a year in which children enter the Wellesley learning community. From the first day of school, their teachers meet them and begin the process of getting to know them as individuals and as learners. As with so many transitions, it is critical to get it right, so that the experience will be a positive one for all members of the community – teachers, administrators, parents and certainly children.

Before my older daughter began kindergarten in 2008, I recall feeling that the hybrid model was unusual and I wondered why Wellesley had chosen to implement such a model when many surrounding schools were offering either traditional half-day or full-day programs. I was so impressed at the Kindergarten meeting at Hunnewell when three veteran teachers and our principal spoke of the rationale for the program. They emphasized the differences between kindergarten and preschool and stressed that our children would need some time to make this transition. There was a lot of focus on the opportunities for calm, small group learning in all areas of the curriculum that would take place in the afternoons when the class size would be reduced from 20 to 10. I left the meeting feeling confident that the addition of stay days over the course of the year would afford my daughter wonderful opportunities for academic work, social experiences both in and out of school, and much needed down time.

Throughout the year, I witnessed the ways in which developmental and educational needs were met by the hybrid curriculum. Her teacher was able to get to know her very quickly as they had wonderful opportunities to interact on the extended days. Her favorite moments were often in the afternoon when she was in a group of ten children. This was a time for much learning in science (through direct experimentation), and social studies as well as other academic areas. The tone in the room, the pace of instruction and the social interactions were all enriched by the small student to teacher ratio.

When I first received your letter on the proposal for full day kindergarten my heart sank. While I agree that full day kindergarten provides a richer educational experience compared with brief half day kindergarten, I feel that this switch would eliminate so many benefits of the hybrid model with very little gain.

Many of the arguments you presented tonight seem to center on the benefits of full day kindergarten compared with half day programs. This is not a valid comparison. As you mentioned, there is little research comparing the benefits of full day kindergarten compared with the current hybrid program. To continue to tout the benefits of full day kindergarten over half-day kindergarten does not make sense given the model that is already in place. According to the recent Boston Globe article, full day kindergarten programs have a minimum of 850 hours of structured learning time. The children in Wellesley kindergarten this year will have nearly 800 hours of structured learning time in the hybrid model (assuming 3.2 hours of structured learning on half days and 5.75 hours of structured learning on full days). This similarity in hours undermines the argument in favor of full day kindergarten. With minor tweaks to the schedule, the Wellesley hybrid could easily meet the criteria for full day kindergarten.

In your presentation you mention the kindergarten programs in comparison communities to underscore the prevalence of full day kindergarten. A review of the websites from the towns that you list followed by calls to those communities reveals that Belmont actually offers both full and half-day kindergarten programs, while the Concord program is really a hybrid in which children have half-days on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the year. The simple comparison you present also does not allow for an evaluation of the length of the school day (in many communities it's shorter than ours) or the average kindergarten class size.

Steven Goodwin from Sprague spoke about the guiding principles of the kindergarten experience outlined by Friedrich Froebel more than 150 years ago: choice time, creativity, social participation and motor expression. I agree that there is a critical role for each of these components in the kindergarten experience, but I also feel strongly that there is a critical need for each of these components outside of school. Spending two additional afternoons at school provides an additional 5-6 hours of instructional time per week, yet undermines the ability for parent/child interactions (these may often be invaluable one on one experiences as older children are in school and younger children nap), field trips, unstructured play - either alone, with school friends or with friends from other schools, and opportunities to be outside engaging in gross motor activities. Different children need these things in different balances. Your proposal advocates taking control of these leisure activities away from parents under the assumption that the experienced kindergarten teachers can be better trusted to know what is most appropriate for children. Perhaps this is true for a small number of children, however, providing them with an additional 5 hours of structured learning time each week comes at a very high cost to the rest of the student population. Some kindergarteners might need to spend time alone with blocks or in dramatic play after a day at school. Others might need to run, climb,

swing and shout, while still others may need to curl up and rest. For any given child, this may change from day to day and week to week. In a class of 20 children it would be impossible to accommodate these different needs.

I was very disappointed at last week’s public forum that you were not interested in hearing the concerns and impressions of the parent community. Your remarks made it clear that you were only willing to answer specific questions. You have solicited input from building principals and kindergarten teachers, but the parent voices have not been part of the conversation. Had there been an opportunity to share concerns, and should there be in the future, I would raise these issues:

- **Loss of smaller effective class size in full day model.** The experience of 10 kids with 1 teacher is fundamentally different than the experience of 20 kids with 1 teacher and 1 TA in the room. Teaching assistants are not the same as teachers. While there are many things that TAs can do incredibly well, they are not providing the same learning experiences as our talented teachers. While there is no research comparing full day and hybrid K models, substantial research does exist in favor of smaller class size.
- **Budgetary constraints are real.** In *The Wellesley Townsman* on 11/17/2011 you describe that you feel this is likely to be an override year. I feel strongly that public support for an override will be weakened through attempts to add Full Day Kindergarten. I will not support an override if full day K is part of the proposed budget. As you cite in your decision to resign at the end of the school year, there are fundamental questions in the community about your administration’s ability to perform basic operations. Inserting this item into the debate at this point greatly undermines your credibility.
- **The timing of this proposal is poor.** This year is a time of great transition within the school department. You have announced your resignation, you have two new building principals whose time on the job can only be measured in months, one building principal is dividing her time between two elementary schools. I don’t believe that this is the right time for a fundamental and significant shift in our educational practices. The timing of this proposal would cripple the ability of the new superintendent to add new programs or ideas and would force him/her to hurriedly implement a program that is controversial in the parent community and in the town at large.
- **The proposal is rushed.** Implementing this proposal next year is rash. As you discussed at the meeting the budget cycle is lengthy and in the best case scenario the budget won’t be approved until town meeting at the end of March. In the event of an override, this process would be extended into May. This creates a great deal of uncertainty for schools, teachers, parents and children. Not knowing what kindergarten will look like cannot be a comfortable feeling for anyone. I am concerned that professional development will not be able to be implemented optimally over the summer and if this were to go into effect next year it would be rushed and premature. The town would also need to hire number of new TAs to staff the program and I hope that this process would be undertaken with appropriate time and consideration so that we could identify the strongest candidates to work with our existing teacher and our children. I feel strongly that the timeframe for implementation should be extended beyond the 2012-2013 school year.
- **This proposal has a tremendous impact on families.** You have not sought input from families with young children to develop an understanding of the full range of sentiment on this issue.

At last week’s meeting, you mentioned six arguments in favor of the full day model:

Argument	Counterargument
Research shows that full day is better than half day	<p>There is no research to support full day K compared with hybrid models.</p> <p>There is much research to support smaller class size and small student:teacher ratios.</p>
Allows for longer blocks of uninterrupted instructional time (improves flexibility in scheduling specialists)	Schedule all K specialists during the first block of the day, or just prior to dismissal/lunch. All other grades have added flexibility to be scheduled around K.

Allows more time to cover existing curriculum	This is “more time” at the expense of “better time” with smaller student:teacher ratios
Allows more time to schedule general education interventions	Schedule these in the afternoon for children who need these services.
Equity – children have different experiences on their “off days”. Full day K allows more time under guidance of classroom teacher.	<p>This is a slippery slope, children also have different experiences in the mornings, after 3 pm, on Wednesday afternoons, on weekends and during school vacations.</p> <p>Spending more time in the classroom may create a more homogeneous experience between the hours of 12-3, but at the expense of children’s ability to pursue their own interests, social opportunities and need for down time.</p> <p>An unintended consequence of a shift to full day K is that many parents of children with summer birthdays and the means to do so may delay entry into K, creating a broader age distribution and even greater disparity in the classroom.</p>
Hybrid model can be expensive and/or challenging for parents.	<p>There are tweaks to the current system that could greatly simplify the hybrid model for parents.</p> <p>A survey of parents could inform discussions about improving the current system without relying on assumptions about what is best for Wellesley families.</p>

In conclusion, I feel strongly that the switch to full day K means giving up a lot in exchange for very little. I urge you to reconsider and postpone the proposal for full day kindergarten.

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**WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED AT 11/16/11 PARENT FORUM:  
FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN**

I have 2 kids at Hunnewell now, and my 3<sup>rd</sup> will be starting kindergarten in this coming fall (2012). I am in full support of the proposal to full day – for all the reasons you mentioned in your slides. During g this forum, I felt those opposed were very vocal and very passionate. In fact, there were several generalized comments that the parent interest was “overwhelmingly” against this change. I do not agree with those comments at all and, in fact, have experienced the opposite observation in my own discussions. The forum comments were not representative of the general population. Again, I am very much in favor of this proposal.

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What is timing if passed? From here to passing, what is the process that the proposal would take? Conclusion: ***I am very supportive of this proposal!!!!*** 90% is an extremely revealing # of programs in MA with full day programs. This will ***benefit*** the children, unquestionably.

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All data, like Mass2020 or CAP, suggest longer days are better. Moreover, standard preschool days run from 7 a.m to 5 p.m. How could we not lengthen the days? In my opinion, we must lengthen the school day. My preference would be for an even longer day than proposed.

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Firstly, I commend you (WPS) for being so forward thinking and realizing the importance of kindergarten and early education. While reviewing the data on full-day kindergarten, I realized that a lot of that research focuses on the clear benefits of full day K for low income (disadvantaged) neighborhoods. While I agree we should always strive to improve, I feel that for OUR COMMUNITY, full day K will come at the expense of small student-teacher ratios, and even these studies show that the gains are short-lived. Therefore, for our community, additional funds are best spend improving student-teacher ratios rather than lengthening the school day, and providing after school resources for those members in our community who need it. Please consider the difference of our school system in comparison to published studies and DO NOT lengthen the school day for kindergarten. Thank you.

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I would love to see the continuation of half days until the start of school in January. I think this provides time for the child to adjust to kindergarten and allows the teacher time to get to know the students during stay days when half the class is at home. At the same time, it transitions to full days at a transition period (following winter break) and allows the child benefits of full day kindergarten for more time than is currently allowed.

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There is no research in favor of ½ day kindergarten and many studies demonstrating that reading and math benefits of full day. I can't understand why we wouldn't change to full day. Anecdotally, my kindergarten hates his half days. He loves full days. He finds the whole schedule confusing, as do I.

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I fully support moving to a full day kindergarten program. I think the majority of kids are ready for this program and would excel and grow emotionally, intellectually, socially greatly. The majority of parents I have spoken with also support this move. Thank you for bringing it up. I would also love an explanation as to why we feel it's beneficial to have a half day EVERY Wednesday in K-5. I don't agree with it, but I've never been told the reason why we have it. Most parents dislike this ½ day. Please explain so we can all understand. Thank you!

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I would like to see the full day kindergarten start in January instead of September. I feel that this would be a good compromise. I think it is important for the kindergarteners to be able to ease into their new environment, yet, I think April is too late to being the full day schedule. I have a 2<sup>nd</sup>

and 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Bates and it has been my experience that they were ready to be in school full time by January.

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What is the process by which this will be decided? As a 2-parents-working family, we fully support the move to full day kindergarten. With 3 children, the oldest entering kindergarten this fall, our ability to both work is highly affected by being able to have access to full day kindergarten. Is a full day option being considered and what would a full day option program look like?

What can we do as a Wellesley family to more actively support the passage of this proposal? Is there a community vote?

I think there will be plenty of time starting May to figure out children's options for August. Please don't be swayed by others who say it is not enough time – they don't work full time! If the move to full time K happens, we would easily and happily adopt our childcare, even if we didn't find out until summer – and it would save us money.

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My major concern was addressed, that being a smaller teacher-child ration in the afternoon. Even though you touched on it, I do not feel it was resolved. My class does have two teachers, for whatever reason on my daughter's stay days. She has 2 teachers for 9 students. You just can't beat that. I am concerned that a full day model won't be as effective.

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What fraction of incoming K students in Wellesley already have experienced full day preschool? (our 4 kids have). We are very supportive of full day K.

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My children will go nuts with the ½ days. I put my 2<sup>nd</sup> grader in WCCC so she wouldn't be bored. I think most children are great with full day kindergarten. I fully support full day K.

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Initially, I was not thrilled w/the idea of changing to all say days, but my current kindergartener's situation has changed my view. The majority of his buddies are in the opposite stay day and the new friends he has made in his stay days stay after for special education services. So, when I pick him up, he is very sad not to stay. He feels left out. Furthermore, he is ready to stay and learn more. I support full day K. I would LOVE to see you implement this ASAP – perhaps after Winter Break or February Break.

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I am fully supportive. I thank you for addressing this!!

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I was surprised to hear as many critical and negative comments tonight about the proposed change to full day kindergarten. I have been talking with parents for weeks about this proposed change, and my distinct impression is that most parents are very supportive of such a change.

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My children have all gone to preschool for longer hours than kindergarten. Not having full day kindergarten has prevented me from going back to work full time. Most other states and countries have full day. Arranging childcare with this situation is all but impossible

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I am in favor of full day kindergarten. For my son, it is better to be in a structured school environment than home all afternoon – often bored. It is very expensive to supplement a half day as well.

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## QUESTIONS . . . . .

Can we make this optional: If you want Hybrid or Full Day – even \$\$ to have it.

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Is there a cost to parents for full day K? What other methods are you considering to pay for the TA? Who ultimately decides?

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Do you think more summer birthday children will be held back?  
How will the small group time that the current hybrid model allows be replicated with a full-time program?

You've talked about how principals feel, what did teachers think?

I hear a lot about how children these days don't get enough playground time; don't read enough at home; rush around to structured activities and are overscheduled. How do you think about full day kindergarten in light of those comments?

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What are the financial costs to the school system? One argument for keeping the current model is that students get more attention from the teacher on stay days. The student:teacher ratio is halved – is this a valid argument? What do K teachers think about shifting to full day K? When would full day K be implemented?

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What are the drawbacks to a full day kindergarten program?  
What is the approval process for a full day kindergarten program?  
Are there any districts that transitioned to full day and then decided to return to half day or hybrid? Why not?

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## TEACHER COMMENTS

Dear Becky and Bella,

We were very excited about meeting on Tuesday to talk about the idea of kindergarten going full time. We looked forward to the opportunity to listen to the plan and have some input. We agreed strongly with Bella's conversation about reasons why this would be a good thing for students.

When talking in small groups, it felt like many of the teachers were against the full day idea and very strongly expressed their thoughts. It is understandable that teachers love the program we have in place because of the small group time and that change can sometimes be hard. But it seems that there is a solid basis with research to support it that a significant change in our structure will be of benefit to all children, and Wellesley is willing and able to support this change philosophically and financially.

In our small groups, we tried to express the positive aspects of a full day kindergarten; specialists in the afternoons allowing for longer academic blocks, building classroom community with whole class in afternoon and more opportunities for kindergartners to play.

We here at Bates feel that this would be a good thing for students success. Schools systems are developing full day programs because of the benefits it has for students. Hopefully in the end, this will be at the heart of a positive change, accompanied by support for teachers who may need that to feel that they are able to be successful.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to share.

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Hi Becky,

I had one more thought that we didn't put on our feedback sheets. I was thinking that if the proposal doesn't go through due to budget constraints, maybe one solution would be to move up 4 stay days to begin after the February vacation. This would mitigate some parent costs, give students additional learning/time at school and not affect the budget at all.

Thanks for including us in this process.

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### **From Meeting with K Teachers:**

What do you see as the positive outcomes of full day kindergarten?

- The schedule would be more flexible; more consistency for some kids.
- The program, AS IT IS, is a gift to children. It gives the kids a time to get extra attention from the teacher (RTI and emotional support) during small group time in the afternoons.
- Convenience for working parents.
- Less transition.
- Specials not just in the morning.
- Having more time to spread out curriculum.

- Opportunity for longer recess or choice time.
- Not adding curriculum.
- Scheduling easier.
- Longer instructional blocks.
- Cost to parents.
- More learning time for all students.
- More opportunity to learn through play.
- Less rushed pace.
- More field trip flexibility.
- More opportunities for development of social interactions.
- Second adult in the room all day would be HUGE help to manage interventions,
- Figuring out the specialist's schedule and SPED schedule will be easier.
- Eliminate parent and building anxiety surrounding stay day assignments.
- Longer social interaction during choice in p.m.
- Quality time or extension of lessons because less rushed.
- Larger instructional blocks in a.m. if no interruptions for specialist.
- Mid-day transition would be streamlined – everyone doing the same thing.
- Mitigate impact of holidays – on stay day, lesson play may become unbalanced.

What questions do you have about moving to full day kindergarten?

- Will we still have the 2.5 weeks at the beginning of the year to do our assessments?
- When will the full days begin?
- What about the children who don't thrive in whole group situations?
- Will we have a TA to help all or because a child has a second adult on his/her IEP? If a child has a second adult on his/her IEP, will we still have another adult there?
- Will there be a cap on the number of students in a class? Can we ensure equity?
- How does full time K make sense with the film *Race to Nowhere*?

Concerns: Quality vs. Quantity

- K's are not independent at all.
- K's are tired even with two stay days.
- K/1 – the afternoons with the 1's alone is necessary in order to meet the kid's needs.
- K teachers want to do the assessments themselves.
- RTI – need individuals/small groups in order to teach the neediest kids. This is difficult when the whole class is there.
- Quieter children more willing to speak in a smaller group in the afternoon. Less stressful environment in afternoon.
- Concern for classrooms that have students with aides – will these aides be considered the K designated aide?
- Will this affect class size?
- Concern for full day impacts the ability to work with small groups and interventions.
- Is the aide/TA full time in each classroom or shared?
- Relationships with preschools to reach out to all community to allow all children to attend preschool for appropriate preparedness for K.
- What will the K/1 model look like?
- How will the proposal be received by the parents? (Expectations for K curriculum).
- The loss of individual attention for each child.
- Loss of rich discussions in small groups.
- Since a decision like this should be research-based, has there been a comparison of a “hybrid” model vs. full day model? Quantity vs. quality?
- Closing the achievement gap is an important goal. Has the administration looked at whether a RTI model could be created to complement the “hybrid model”? Perhaps students who might be “at risk” could be part of a RTI group on non-stay days and receive scholarship money to attend WCCC for more opportunities to participate in a rich early childhood experience. Possibly some community organizations might be interested in financing such an initiative.
- Will increasing the amount of time really provide children with what they need?
- Has the system considered, rather than full day K all year, moving stay days to February?
- Would TA be one that is designated for children on IEPs or separate?
- Full day or afternoon TA?
- Will we still have the 2.5 week half day assessment period?

What should we be considering to facilitate a successful transition to full day kindergarten, if our proposal moves forward?

- Uniform assessments (similar to math).
- Time at beginning of year for assessments?
- Afternoon specials?
- If we have TA in our classrooms, there needs to be a training for them beforehand. (What happens if there is a child who requires a second adult, but that adult can't help with the whole class? Is there another TA?)
- Continue redistricting?
- K/1 is not a full day program – it is not in the best interest of the first graders.
- Consider a transition in September. Keep smaller groups for K incoming assessments. Start as .5 day for September then add stay days later in fall.
- This impacts schools differently based on that school's specific population.
- Would be critical to have a full time, qualified, dedicated TA (educator).
- Will K teachers be part of TA hiring?
- Discussions with K/1 teachers about how this would impact their program.
- Could students start full days after October – two full months to practice routines.
- Discussions about what the K full day schedule would look like – specialists in afternoon?
- Are we keeping in the phasing in of full days to keep screening and assessment opportunities available?
- What if the budget doesn't support a full-time TA? Will we still move forward with the model?
- How do we maintain the quality of our program once small group time is minimized?
- Can we hire WCCC teachers who may not be needed if the proposal moves forward to work as TAs.
- Specialists in p.m. is a priority.
- Pullouts should be in p.m.
- What is the tipping point for proposal with or without TAs?
- Class size cap.
- Sharing TA is better than no TA, however, kindergarten is an unpredictable place, so a second person all day is a preferred model.