

Monday, 1 February 2016

My name is Ashley E. Renz. I am a full-time college student, as is my husband, and we are the proud parents of two school-age children in the Jefferson County School District in Lakewood, Colorado. Our daughter is in first grade; our son is in kindergarten.

Last year, our neighborhood school was able to offer free full-day kindergarten to all families regardless of income or need, but their grant ran out at the end of the year. Thanks to new strides in education reform, our school was able to offer free full-day to any student who qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch, and so our son is currently benefitting from that.

We are not natives to Denver, Colorado. In fact, we moved here nearly four years ago from Charleston, South Carolina, where I grew up. My husband grew up in San Diego, California, and the both of us had never heard of public schools that needed to charge tuition for kindergarten. On both sides of the nation, it is a given that public education offers full-day kindergarten for free, because it is recognized as necessary to educational success and thus made law. It is vital to a child's education that they receive kindergarten, and even better, a full day - and it is the goal of public education that it be offered for free. It cannot be called "public" if it does not apply to every person in the state or the nation. True public assistance should be available to all, regardless of income or level of need. How is it that two state governments, thousands of miles apart in both physicality and legislative practices, can perceive and carry out this program, but states such as Colorado in the middle let the concept soar over its collective head?

The benefits of free full-day kindergarten not only include better understanding of concepts throughout a person's educational career. It helps families as well. Consider the single parent who must work two jobs in order to provide for his or her children. Where will that child go if the parent is working and school ends for the child at 11:30 AM? To daycare, most likely, where the educational experience is slim at best, where germs are more likely to result in illnesses (and consequently, absences from school), and where several thousands of dollars of that single parent's income will go every year. This is far from economical or efficient. In short, it is ludicrous. To even call the two and a half hours a child attends the shortened kindergarten class "half day" is absurd. School is nearly seven hours long for full day students. In order for it to be true half day, the program would require 3.3 hours of curriculum. There is no logic in bringing a child to school for two and a half hours, only to bring them home again – or to daycare or another caregiver. Those with family in Colorado who can be relied upon for free childcare are lucky – and few.

Please pass Bill 16-023 into law today. The longer we wait, the more our children lose. Thank you.