



Hilldale's Exemplary Kindergarten Program

In the January 26, 2005 edition of Education Week a very interesting article was written by Linda Jacobson titled, "Teachers of Kindergarteners Adapt to Full Days: Expanding their time in class, youngsters are moving beyond the basics."

James Morris, the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Instruction for the Los Angeles Unified School District, succinctly describes the problem that most kindergarten programs across the United States have: "Unfortunately, in a half-day program, you have little time for beyond the basics... We really believe this is the key to preventing the achievement gap." It allows students to develop their skills and delve deeper into topics they are studying. Arizona's Governor Napolitano says that the children "will be better prepared to learn, they will be less likely to drop out of high school, and they will have higher academic achievement if we start them off on a stronger footing."

Numerous studies have found significant benefits for kindergarten teachers and their students who have a full day program. First, there is more time for one-on-one and small group instruction as compared to teaching to the entire class. Second, there is more time to assess students and tailor instruction to meet the specific needs of the individual. Third, teachers have more time to develop basic skills and delve deeper into the topics covered. Fourth, the students already know the basic full-day routine and do not have to take time out of first grade studies to learn it. Because of these things, nine states and many local districts now have full-day kindergarten programs, and many others have placed this on their top-priority wish list. Unfortunately, most areas of California are not among them.

The Hilldale School has an exceptional kindergarten program that embodies the reasons for having an all-day program. It far surpasses what is found in almost all public schools classes in the San Francisco Unified School District and equals or exceeds the programs of most private schools in the peninsula. Students are introduced to the usual kindergarten topics during the fall and to first grade topics from January through June. They are excited about the newfound learning experiences and love to come to school.

Because literacy is the key to learning in all subjects, our kindergarten students have intensive training in this area. They not only have ninety minutes of reading and language arts every day, including pre-reading and reading skills, phonics, spelling, beginning grammar skills, handwriting, and composition, but these skills are reinforced throughout the rest of the day in other subjects such as social studies and science. Hilldale kindergarteners also learn math every day and are introduced to science and social studies concepts several hours each week. The activities involve many hands-on experiences which are both fun and instructive. They often incorporate music and art, and they allow for plenty of free expression and critical inquiry.

In addition to the core subjects mentioned above, one of the things which sets Hilldale apart from other kindergarten programs are the additional specialist classes which are offered. Because our students attend kindergarten from 8:30-3:30 each day, we can offer classes in art, music, and ethics once a week; Spanish and physical education twice a week, and computer skills three times a week. These vital ancillary subjects do not cut into the regular core teaching time, but instead reinforce them through in depth and interdisciplinary instruction.

Ms. Pon-Barry, Hilldale's kindergarten teacher, knows that young students learn best through a wide variety of activities. She keeps things interesting by conducting large group, small group, and individual instruction. Activities are short enough to fit within the children's attention span, but are targeted to make the most of the time. Kindergarten students have plenty of time to play and socialize with their peers during the three scheduled recess times each day.

If you know of potential kindergarten students, be sure to let them know of our excellent program. If you have a child of this age, you are welcome to call or e-mail any of the current kindergarten parents to solicit their feedback on the quality of our program. We are confident that they will give a positive referral.