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Indiana will pay for full-day kindergarten



Written by

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Indiana will fund full-day kindergarten for any child who wants it and whose school district offers it, Gov. Mitch Daniels announced this morning.

With the state finally expecting an upswing in tax revenues, Daniels said Indiana will use \$150 million of it to increase K-12 school funding in the budget currently being crafted in the legislature.

Of that money, about 25 percent will be used to increase the funding of full-day kindergarten. Another, smaller fund will be set aside to help school districts give merit pay increases to teachers under the new performance evaluation system being passed in this year's legislature. The balance, he said, will go into the school funding formula to benefit all school districts.

Daniels, joined by House Speaker Brian Bosma, R-Indianapolis, and Senate President Pro Tempore David Long, R-Fort

Wayne, in a news conference in his Statehouse office, called the money a "discipline dividend" -- a reward for having tightened the state's fiscal belt during the recession. He noted other states are slashing school funding, and said he knew of no other state that will increase it this year.

Currently, not every school district in Indiana offers full-day kindergarten and there are no plans in the legislature now to mandate that they offer it.

Bosma said that currently the state provides about \$58.5 million annually for full-day kindergarten. School districts receive half the amount that they receive for each student enrolled in grades 1 through 12, plus an additional grant from the state's full-day kindergarten fund. That's currently about \$1,030 per child. However, some school districts charge for full-day kindergarten, and state Department of Education officials said that whether the state funding is enough to cover the cost of the program will vary from

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district to district.

In a release, the DOE said the funding increase will provide all schools access to full-day kindergarten grants, which currently reach about 75 percent of all full-day kindergarten students. The funding increase will allow the state to provide them to the remaining 25 percent.

Dennis Costerison, executive director of the Indiana Association of School Business Officials, said the news is “a win for school corporations. It’s definitely a win for parents and most importantly it’s a win for students.”

Indiana has been debating whether to offer full-day kindergarten for every student since the late 1990s under Democrat Gov. Frank O’Bannon. Daniels took up the issue when he was elected in 2004, and said today’s announcement completes that commitment.



Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, middle, talks about the improved state revenue forecast during a news conference at the Statehouse in Indianapolis today. The improved forecast will mean an additional \$150

million for the state's public schools. Joining Daniels was Speaker of the House Brian Bosma., left, and Senate President Pro Tempore David Long. / Darron Cummings / Associated Press

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