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## Switching to full-day kindergarten

Shift in several districts will leave just 6 of 41 in region with half-day programs

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**COLONIE** — Two area school districts will end a program this fall that gradually increases the length of the school day for kindergartners.

In all four Scotia-Glenville and three South Colonie elementary schools, 5-year-olds begin in smaller classes for half of a day. As the school year progresses, the hours lengthen until the two half-day classes join together for a full-day program.

Both districts will switch to full-day kindergarten.

With Bethlehem schools also moving to full-day kindergarten next year, only six of 41 districts in the Capital Region will offer half-day programs.

It is a move popular with working parents, but it raises concerns among those who worry the transition to a full day of school comes too soon for their youngsters.

Mary Shelton, president of the Saddlewood Elementary School PTA, has a son in the transitional kindergarten.

"I don't think he needed to do a transition. He would have been ready in the fall," she said. "I just think today kids are ready for it. My son has been in day care since he was 6 months old, and I prefer he'd be in school learning. Most parents I've spoken with are very supportive."

Adam Mainville, whose daughter Laura is in the program at Shaker Road Elementary, said he prefers the gradual growth in the length of the school day. His daughter had trouble getting used to a half-day prekindergarten program, he said, but the transitional kindergarten helped her adjust to a full day.

"For my daughter, it turned out to be a very good thing," he said. "This was a nice way to ease her into school."

The Saddlewood, Roessleville and Shaker Road elementary schools in South Colonie all offer transitional kindergarten, though two of the schools only started it this year. The district's other two elementary schools offer a half-day program.

South Colonie started the transitional kindergarten program after Michael Marcelle became superintendent. Marcelle previously had introduced the concept to Scotia-Glenville while serving as its superintendent. He now is retired.

Officials in both districts cite a number of factors for the change.

"Most of our kids come from prekindergarten and nursery school experiences," said Ernie Casile, principal of Saddlewood Elementary. "The full day will allow the children and the teachers to work more in depth on academic topics. It also provides a better opportunity to catch students who may be at risk. It will also allow us to develop a more well-rounded program. They will now get art and music as well as expanded physical education."

Saddlewood teacher Anne Hoffman said she is looking forward to having more time with her pupils. The students started a full-time schedule in February, she said, and she already sees a difference.

The state Legislature also provides more aid for schools to transition to full-day kindergarten.

Educational studies differ on which approach is more effective.

Carol Rasowsky, an assistant professor of teacher education at the College of Saint Rose, said a national study of 20,000 pupils that began following students in 1998-99 shows other factors are more important in students' growth than the length of the kindergarten day. The involvement of parents, quality of the program and the number of students in their class all play a greater role in achievement, she said.

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