



*Originally published in the Whittier Daily News on April 10, 2008*

**A shift in time at local district**

## **South Whittier's schools switching to full-day kindergarten**

By Tracy Garcia, Staff Writer

SOUTH WHITTIER - As a former school principal, South Whittier School District Assistant Superintendent Rosa Pope said there always seemed to be one question on parents' minds when they came to register their preschoolers for the fall semester.

"Do you have full-day kindergarten?"

Before this year, the answer was no - and then, Pope said, "parents would ask for a permit to go to another district that did provide it."

That's all about to change. South Whittier has become the latest local district to drop its half-day kindergarten program in favor of a full day of instruction for its youngest students next fall.

Most Whittier-area school districts now offer full-day kindergarten.

"Every district around here is suffering from declining enrollment," Pope said. "We did this because we want to provide for our families and meet their needs."

"We did our research on full-day programs and the effects and impact on kids," Pope said, adding that core academic lessons would take place only in the morning, before lunchtime.

"On an individual basis, if the children can't stay after lunch, then parents can take them home," Pope said. "But really, kids are resilient. And the afternoon activities - art, P.E. - they're not going to want to miss that. They're not going to want to go home."

The South Whittier district has about 380 kindergarten students this year. Officials expect full-day kindergarten will attract more students. The annual cost is minimal, from \$5,000 to \$10,000, to pay for extra supplies. But if full-day attracts even an extra two students, the district will have recouped that cost, officials said.

At the East Whittier City School District, board members are considering whether to expand the full-day kindergarten pilot program from four classes to eight next year.

So far, Assistant Superintendent Linda Welch said, "We've had very positive feedback from the teachers and parents."

"Teachers said they feel they're able to pace the day in a way that's developmentally appropriate - they don't always feel so rushed," Welch said. "The lesson plans are similar to what they did in the half-day program, but they have more time to meet the individual needs of students."

To help with the transition to full-day next year, the South Whittier district is opening up its elementary schools from 9a.m. to noon Saturday for a kindergarten parent registration/orientation event.

Teachers will be on hand, classrooms will be open and parents can sign up for the free Think Together after-school program at the different sites.

The kindergarten teachers have also put together a school-readiness packet for youngsters to do over the summer, Pope said.

"This is one of our marketing plans," Pope said. "We also have a California Teacher of the Year - and short of floating him around the district, we just want to show everyone that we have good schools.

"The parents are our customers, and we want to give good customer service," she said. "We're ready for them to show up."

[tracy.garcia@sgvn.com](mailto:tracy.garcia@sgvn.com)

(562) 698-0955, Ext. 3051