A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF KINDERGARTEN
IN THE UNITED STATES

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by
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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective. Most early education teachers were taught that developmentally appropriate practices for kindergarten were to promote learning through play and socialization. Previously, kindergarten had been allowed to function as a unique learning environment which was different than the elementary grades (Cuban, 1992). Its curriculum was based on child development knowledge (Goffin, 1989), focused on the importance of a partnership with parents and families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and emphasized the whole child using play and toy materials in a nonacademic climate (Cuban, 1992). However attitudes from parents, first grade teachers and political legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and its call for accountability and high stakes testing have resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007). Kindergarten is no longer expected to act as a bridge between early educational experiences and the rigors of “real school” (Graue, 2001; Hatch, 2002). Graue (2009) states we now expect kindergartners to learn to read rather than learning to tie their shoes. This study researched the historical literature to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time in three southeastern Massachusetts public school systems which were renamed to maintain confidentiality. The study was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001).

Key words: Skill based curriculum, Teacher-directed instruction, Play based curriculum or Developmentally appropriate practice, Child-centered instruction, High-stakes testing.
Dedication

Dedicated with love and appreciation to my beloved grandmother:

Kathryn King

Who always believed in me and was confident I could accomplish anything.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There is substantial debate among parents, early childhood educators and policy makers about the purposes and goals of kindergarten and the optimum method to achieve these goals (Vecchiotti, 2001). The “traditional” model of kindergarten emphasizes educating the whole child by promoting learning through play and socialization (Lee, Burkham, Ready, Honigman & Meisels, 2006, p. 106). Children will gain social, emotional and academic skills through their natural curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. An alternative philosophy is that kindergarten should prepare children for first grade academics by teaching formal structured lessons (Lee et al., p. 106). The earlier acquisition of discrete skills such as reading and math allows the students to better achieve in school. Advocates for a “developmentally appropriate” kindergarten are criticized for underestimating children’s capacity to learn concepts and skills (Bursuck, Smith, Munk, Damer, Melhig, & Perry, 2004; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Advocates for a “formal kindergarten” are criticized for ignoring school readiness and narrowing the curriculum (Elkind, 1987; Miller & Almon, 2009). While kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in most states (Education Commission of the States, n.d.), the majority of students attend an all day kindergarten (Miller, 2005; Noble & Kedzior, 2003). Over the years, kindergarten participation has increased to where most five year olds attend (Vecchiotti, 2001). Shepard and Smith (1988) attributed this gradual and continuous escalation of the early grades curriculum as a response to nearly universal kindergarten attendance, educational television such as “Sesame Street” raising the norms, increased expectations from parents and escalating district guidelines. More recent articles (Ableser, 2008; Kotansky, 2003) credit the increased academic demands to high stakes testing and rising state standards. Lee, et al. (2006) and Shepard and Smith (1988) state that
policymakers are pressuring for increased cognitive demands in kindergarten. This study researched the historical literature to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. The study was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001).

**Significance of the Problem**

The significance of the problem is great as changes in the kindergarten experience impacts students, teachers and families locally, statewide and across the country. Perspective on how and why the kindergarten experience has changed, how this transforms the practices of teachers and the experiences of learners and how this is reflected by various stakeholders is important. Historical research can provide insight into the historical development of kindergarten, the change agents involved and support further discussion on the impact of the changed kindergarten experience.

Miller and Almon (2009) refer to the current kindergarten experience as a crisis. An empirical study or descriptive history of kindergarten curriculum introduces a more objective presentation. An in-depth exploration of facts, details and comparisons of documents along a timeline enable the reader to distinguish events and identify significant variations in an event (Danto, 2008). William H. Payne, from the University of Michigan, valued studying the history of education and insisted it has “uses which are general and comprehensive” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 74). Missing from the historical literature is the extent to which government policies and
legislation have framed the kindergarten curriculum and research on the outcomes of those changes. The context of the evolution of kindergarten instruction was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The government and its policies appears to have greatly influenced kindergarten over the years (Russell, 2011; Sandfort, Selden & Sowa, 2008). In 1837, the first private kindergarten opened with the philosophy of Froebel’s metaphysical goals (Shepard & Smith, 1988). When the first public kindergarten in the United States opened in 1873, the goals changed to inculcating cultural values and norms (Lee, et al., 2006). The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 represented the first time federal dollars had a role in public school policies (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque & Crump, 2008). The A Nation at Risk report of 1983 declared a crisis in American education (Bracey, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act called for accountability through teacher quality and high-stakes testing (Elmore, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003). The process of understanding the background of the kindergarten experience through a detailed analysis of historical data can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends and future possibilities (“The Historical Approach”, n.d.).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective. Most early education teachers were taught that developmentally appropriate practices for kindergarten were to promote learning through play and socialization. Previously, kindergarten had been allowed to function as a unique learning environment which was different than the elementary grades
(Cuban, 1992). Its curriculum was based on child development knowledge (Goffin, 1989), focused on the importance of a partnership with parents and families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and emphasized the whole child using play and toy materials in a nonacademic climate (Cuban, 1992). However attitudes from parents, first grade teachers and political legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and its call for accountability and high stakes testing have resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007). Kindergarten is no longer expected to act as a bridge between early educational experiences and the rigors of “real school” (Graue, 2001; Hatch, 2002). Graue (2009) states we now expect kindergartners to learn to read rather than learning to tie their shoes. Booher-Jennings (2005) states kindergarten must now meet its long-standing goals of supporting children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development along with starting the process of preparing children for success on the high-stakes standardized tests they will begin taking in third grade. “Now, newspapers and magazines across the country are reporting that kindergarten is the new first grade – full of pressure and short on play” (Williams, 2011, p. 1). Williams (2011) reported The Washington Post (2007), Chicago Tribune (2010), Newsweek (2006) and Scholastic Instructor (2007) have all written about kindergarten’s emphasis on more work and less play. This study researched the historical literature to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. The study was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001).
Research Questions:

**Primary:** How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?

**Secondary:** How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?

Attitudes and beliefs regarding the purposes, goals and curriculum for kindergarten instruction have changed over time. In order to document these changes, the primary research question allowed the researcher to explore the attitudes and beliefs toward the kindergarten experience at different periods of time beginning with the mid 1800’s leading up to today.

The secondary question addressed how political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about kindergarten which in turn transformed the experience and impacted the kindergarten curriculum. Advocates say current early education policies are based on unproven methods rather than research based practices and are fueled by political pressures rather than educational knowledge (National School Boards Association, 2006). It is important for educators to understand from a historical perspective how kindergarten instruction was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of society at various time periods. How do five year olds learn best? This question was explored based on the attitudes and norms present in various points of history. Learning more about the history, changes and purposes of kindergarten including political and social pressures for curriculum changes illustrated how and why the kindergarten experience has changed.
Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study addresses the theoretical framework, a literature review and the research design. The theoretical framework included two widely respected developmental theories. These theories helped make sense of the multiple changes children go through over time and how children learn. Developmental theories helped to articulate the problem of practice and research design. The literature review connected previously published literature and debates about kindergarten to the problem of practice. The research design identified the research questions, methodology, validity and protection of human subjects.

Theoretical Framework

The impact of attitudes and beliefs about the goal and purpose of kindergarten was examined through the lens of developmental theory. The developmental theories were chosen as a framework because they are applicable to studying and making sense of the multiple changes children go through over time and specifically how children learn. Developmental theories describe changes over time in multiple areas such as social behavior, thought, language or perception (Miller, 2002). Maier (1965) states the study of child development includes the sequential steps, stages or levels through which a child passes and the quantitative and qualitative factors which help to shape a child’s personality. Singer and Revenson (1997) state understanding children’s intellectual development is essential for parents and teachers. This knowledge serves as a guideline to view a child’s intellectual progress. They define development as a biological term representing physical growth over time. When applied to psychology, the growth includes a child’s emotions, thinking and ways of coping with the environment. The theories organize and give meaning to facts, guide further research and offer
implications for educational applications. Two major developmental theorists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, dominated the topic of children’s cognitive development (Garton, 2004). Maier (1965, p.8) states Piaget’s work in the study of cognitive thought undoubtedly stands as an unsurpassed milestone. Van der Verr and Valsiner (1991) identify Vygotsky as having the most potent influence on developmental theories since the beginning of the century.

Garton’s (2004) comparison of the two theories found differences and similarities. Simplistically, Piaget’s theory could be regarded as an “inside-out” one meaning a child’s cognition develops independently of environmental and social influences and is genetically predetermined. The rate at which a child constructs knowledge varies. Vygotsky’s “outside-in” theory regards a child’s developing knowledge as a reflection of the child’s cultural, historical and social background. More expert people assist children to learn. However both theorist did espouse development as a systematic hierarchy, defined interaction as important to learning and used clinical methods of observations in their research.

Developmental Theorist Jean Piaget

Singer & Revenson (1997) summarize the essential elements of Piaget’s research as the stages of development and the child’s construct of reality via physical manipulation of the environment and then through symbolic representation. Piaget’s (1955) Cognitive-Stage theory is the most widely known theory of cognitive development. His study of the development of children influenced many disciplines such as psychology, education and philosophy. One of Piaget’s main contributions was his brand of epistemology which combined philosophy with the scientific method of logic and fact (Miller, 2002; Piaget, 1972). He proposed that a small set of mental operations (mental actions) underlies a wide variety of thinking episodes. He classified
development into four stages of development (sensory motor, pre-operational, concrete 
operational and formal operational). Piaget is understood to have identified the stages as 
sequential, universal and each stage derives from the previous stage. He wrote the stages are a 
structured whole in a state of equilibrium and each stage involves a coming into being and a 
being (Miller, 2002). Piaget is cited for recognizing development as an individual activity while 
still acknowledging that culture and socialization factors play a role in cognitive 
development. Piaget was noted for focusing mainly on cognitive development and mental 
processes such as reasoning, believing, remembering and perceiving (Singer & Revenson, 1997). 
Piaget is understood to have proposed development is an adaptive process and recognized that 
adaptations are different in different environments. It is recognized he stated the child constructs 
knowledge via a biological system. His proposed development is a process of construction based 
on organism-environment interactions in various conditions (Maynard, 2008). Piaget is known 
for stating that mental structures such as nervous system and sensory organs are genetically 
determined and set limits for intellectual function at certain ages (Singer & Revenson, 1997). 
Singer and Revenson (1997) summarize that Piaget believed children learn by doing. Children 
play an active role in their intellectual growth – observing, imitating and most importantly 
interpreting. Cognitive development involves understanding a new experience based on previous 
experiences. Intellectual development is cumulative.

According to Piaget, the most important principle of human functioning is adaptation 
(Singer & Revenson, 1997). Pulaski (1971) states for Piaget adaptation is the basis for behavior 
and the essence of intellectual and biological functioning. It is the continuous process of 
learning to adjust to changes in the environment. This process consists of both assimilation 
(fitting new information into preconceived notions about the world) and accommodation
(revising preconceived notions to fit in with new information). The dual process of assimilation and accommodation combine to produce adaptation (Piaget, 1952; Pulaski, 1971; Singer & Revenson, 1997). These two processes consistently operate at both the biological and intellectual levels. They enable both physical and cognitive growth (Piaget, 1952; Pulaski, 1971). This is understood to enable a child to form a simple mental image or pattern of action (schema) in order to interpret objects in their environment. For instance, a baby would initially try to understand a rattle through assimilation. The baby has learned to suck on a bottle or breast. Therefore, when given a rattle they would try to suck on it also. When the past experience of receiving milk doesn’t work, the baby is forced to accommodate and learns rattles make noise but do not produce milk. The baby is developing intellectually and functioning adaptively (Pulaski, 1971). Piaget noted eventually the baby will develop one schema for edible objects and another for non-edible objects (Pulaski, 1971). Piaget (1952) stated:

In conclusion, assimilation and accommodation, at first antagonistic to the extent that the first remains egocentric and the second is simply imposed by the external environment, complete each other to the extent they are differentiated, the coordination of the schemata of assimilation favoring the progress of accommodation and vice versa. So it is that, from the sensorimotor plane on, intelligence presupposes an increasingly close union of which the exactitude and the fecundity of reason will one day be the dual product. (p. 418)
Piaget (1973) stated an organism constantly and simultaneously assimilates and accommodates the structure to its milieu. Equilibrium or equilibration, as Piaget calls it, is a balance between the two processes (Piaget, 1973; Singer & Revenson, 1997). Pulaski (1971) notes that Piaget states the search for equilibrium or answers that make sense of the world is the mechanism for growth and transition in cognitive development. Gauvin (2001) states according to Piaget, disequilibrium or the difference between what a child knows and the information presented by the environment is the key impetus of cognitive growth. Maturation is important in both mental and physical development. Piaget is understood to declare a child simply doesn’t have the structures of thought and reasoning to answer the same types of questions or problems an adult could (Pulaski, 1971). Piaget’s developmental stages are sequential with later stages being built on earlier ones and requiring more complex motor skills and cognitive abilities. The sequence is fixed and necessary in order for children to achieve an adult level of intellectual functioning. All children pass through the stages in the same order but the timing and rate they pass through can vary (Piaget, 1952; Pulaski, 1971; Singer & Revenson, 1997).

Piaget’s studies on the language and thoughts of children illustrated how young children speak, think and learn. Piaget determined that up until the age of five or seven and a half, children prefer to work alone rather than in small or large groups (Piaget, 1955). At that age, he determined the function of language is egocentric and socialized. Even when alone, children were found to speak as they act; to accompany movement with play and words. When referring to six and a half year old students, Piaget stated “The child does not in the first instance communicate with his Fellow-beings in order to share thoughts and reflexions; he does so in order to play” (Piaget, 1955, p .48). Intellectual or academic communication is limited to what’s strictly necessary. One of his conclusions was language for children is as much movement,
copying and gestures as it is words. Language is a basic component of children’s play (Piaget, 1955). Other conclusions articulated from Piaget’s research include children learn by doing (Singer & Revenson, 1997) and a child’s effort to objectively communicate their own thoughts and understand someone else’s thoughts doesn’t appear until around seven years or seven and a half years old (Piaget, 1955). Piaget (1955) states until this age, children are not interested in how something happened or in logical justification. Prior to this age, children demonstrate verbalism by really believing they understood when they may not have. It is promoted the sequence of developmental states are fixed and unchangeable (Singer & Revenson, 1997). These insights offer educational implications on how to best teach young children.

**Developmental Theorist Lev Vygotsky**

As a socioculturist, Vygotsky (1962) stressed the importance of one's culture in development. It is maintained he believed human behavior cannot be understood without the context of one's culture (Pass, 2007). Culture defines what knowledge and skills are valued and therefore taught. Vygotsky (1978) stated the mind cannot be understood without considering the surrounding society. He identified children's thinking as being attributed to social interactions and psychological tools such as language (Miller, 2002; Vygotsky, 1962). His experiments demonstrated a child’s speech is as important as their behavior is in solving a problem. Children speak about what they are doing. Sometimes speech is so vital that children cannot accomplish a given task without it (Vygotsky, 1978). He proposed cognitive development occurs through resolving conflicts. Vygotsky (1962) viewed a child-in-context involved in an activity as the smallest meaningful unit of study. When considering context it is important to look at the larger culture or environment where a child lives and the specific setting. The mind is inherently social and the sociocultural-historical context defines and molds children's experiences. Social
problem solving and expressing feelings is the essence of cognition. Vygotsky also proposed that social activity shapes the mind. When a child and an adult or older child interact on the intermental (between minds) plane, it becomes internalized into the intramental (within mind) plane or the child's mind (Astington, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962). Researchers articulate he stated psychological and technical tools provided by a culture mediate intellectual functioning (Astington, 1999; Miller, 2002). Parkes (2004) declares Vygotsky's most famous concept is the zone of proximal development. In the zone of proximal development, a more skilled or competent adult or peer collaborates with a child to move them from where they are (their current competency) to slightly beyond that to where they can be with assistance. “The ZPD can become a powerful concept in developmental research, one that can markedly enhance the effectiveness and utility of the application of diagnostics of mental development to educational problems” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). It is understood Vygotsky recognized that individuals could present with a range of levels of ability dependent upon the level of social support. A child performing a task independently is performing at their functional level. However with environmental supports such as modeling, giving instructions, the use of familiar material, etc. the same child could improve to their optimal level. That same child could perform even better at a scaffolded level when a person with a higher level of skill co-participates with the child (Demetriou, Shayer & Efklides, 1994). Vygotsky (1978) stated the distinguishing feature of human psychology is our ability to engage in higher psychological functions. Gauvin (2001) noted Vygotsky asserted higher mental functions are facilitated by children interacting with more experienced members of their community.

Vygotsky (1978) agreed with Piaget on the importance of play and that a child’s speech and their actions were both necessary towards achieving whatever goal the child had in mind.
Play, language and actions are elements of the same complex psychological function involved in problem solving. In fact, sometimes young children cannot accomplish a task if they are not allowed to speak. Vygotsky differed from Piaget as far as development being a prerequisite for learning. He determined learning and development are interrelated from birth but the learning process occurs first and then the development occurs second (Vygotsky, 1978). This sequence explains the concept of zones of proximal development. He stated “the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening function” (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 104). Vygotsky’s (1978) studies and theories offered specific practical implications for education. For example, his practical implications for writing are 1) it would be natural to teach writing during preschool, 2) writing should be meaningful for children and 3) writing should be taught naturally (Vygotsky, 1978). It is maintained Vygotsky’s concept of developmental range allows educators to begin teaching content with social supports rather than wait for a child’s emergence of readiness (Demetriou, et al., 1994),

**Application to Study**

Piaget’s stages of development and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development remind educators that curriculums need to be developmentally appropriate in order for learning to take place. Kindergarten students cannot be expected to learn curriculum that is either too far away from their current skill level or not in their current stage of development. Miller (2002) notes that Piaget stated knowledge of the world develops through a series of discrete states of equilibrium (stages) between the organism and the environment. Teachers who have an understanding of where their students’ skills currently are can better guide them through prompts, clues, modeling, discussion, etc. to the next logical skill. Vygotsky believed children
learn by building on the competencies the child already has and by providing learning opportunities to support the student moving slightly ahead in competence. While both theorists promote developmentally appropriate practices, they differ on when a child is ready to learn. However, they do both agree that language and play are vital for a kindergarten student to learn.

As this study examined the emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective, it’s prudent to look at this problem through the research based lens of developmental theorists.

**Definition of Terms**

This section serves to define important terms used throughout the research document. These definitions provide clarity of reference throughout this research study. Important definitions are as follows:

A **skill based curriculum** has a reading program that includes intensive, comprehensive, explicit instruction in a) phonemic awareness or the understanding that discrete sounds comprise words in oral language, b) alphabetic principle or the knowledge that letters in written words represent sounds, c) word identification skills leading to accurate, fluent reading and d) comprehension (Chard & Dickson, 1999).

**Teacher-directed instruction** emphasizes mastery of basic skills through the medium of structured tasks, practice and repetition (Stipek & Byler, 1997).

A **play based curriculum** or **developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)** includes a) all the domains of development and learning are important and closely interrelated, b) learning rates vary among children, c) children develop best when they have positive relationships with adults and peers, d) learning occurs in social and cultural contexts, e) children learn in a variety of
ways and f) play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition and social competence (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

**Child-centered instruction** emphasizes understanding child development in general, the development of each child specifically and the cultural and social influences on each child. This understanding is imperative when planning developmentally appropriate instruction. Young children learn best through authentic, meaningful and purposeful learning experiences guided by responsive adults to mold the child’s growth and development (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** was enacted in 1965 to offer equitable educational opportunities to the nation’s disadvantaged. This legislation provided federal financial support for educationally vulnerable school children (Thomas & Brady, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 1965).

**A Nation at Risk report** was a report written in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education summarizing research papers and public hearings to investigate the quality of education in the United States. It proclaimed the K-12 educational achievement was declining and imperiling our technological and economic status (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** also known as NCLB is a federal law aimed at improving the performance of U.S. schools by increasing the standards of accountability, providing parents with more flexibility in choosing the schools their children will attend and promotes an increased focus on reading and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
**High-stakes testing** describes tests that have serious consequences for students, teachers, schools and school districts such as retention, school ratings and monetary incentives (Jones & Egley, 2004).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Background

The purpose of the study was to examine the kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective. Most early education teachers were taught that developmentally appropriate practices for kindergarten were to promote learning through play and socialization. Previously, kindergarten had been allowed to function as a unique learning environment which was different than the elementary grades (Cuban, 1992). Its curriculum was based on child development knowledge (Goffin, 1989), focused on the importance of a partnership with parents and families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and emphasized the whole child using play and toy materials in a nonacademic climate (Cuban, 1992). However attitudes from parents, first grade teachers and political legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and it’s call for accountability and high stakes testing have resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007). Kindergarten is no longer expected to act as a bridge between early educational experiences and the rigors of “real school” (Graue, 2001; Hatch, 2002). Graue (2009) states we now expect kindergartners to learn to read rather than learning to tie their shoes. Booher-Jennings (2005) states kindergarten must now meet its long-standing goals of supporting children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development along with starting the process of preparing children for success on the high-stakes standardized tests they will begin taking in third grade.

This study researched the historical literature to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. The study was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first
kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The study addressed two research questions:

**Primary:** How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?

**Secondary:** How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?

These questions suggested multiple bodies of literature to be reviewed to more fully understand the historical perspective of kindergarten in the United States. To understand attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten over time, the history of kindergarten, what kindergarten looks like today and how it varies and how children learn best (through play based or skill based curriculums) was researched. The research of legislation, the consequences of high stakes testing, societal and parental pressures and media influence assisted in addressing how political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching in learning in the kindergarten class.

**History of Kindergarten**

The history of kindergarten provides the background necessary to comprehend the goals and purposes of kindergarten. Friedrich Froebel started the first kindergarten or “a child’s garden” in Germany in 1837. He believed kindergarten should be a nurturing environment where children could develop their mental, social and emotional facilities through play, music and movement before starting the formal academic rigors of the academic system (Lee, et al., 2006). His approach highlighted a reverence for nature and prepared students between the ages
of 2 to 6 years of age by using manipulatives, songs, dance, finger play, paper crafts and games (Fromberg, 2006). Froebel’s initial model for kindergarten promoted young children learning through a variety of physical manipulations and play (William, 1992). Kindergarten was viewed as a protected place to develop the multiple dimensions of children before they entered the formal educational system (Lee, et al., 2006). Froebel’s philosophy that young children think and learn differently than older children and adults was a cornerstone of early childhood education at that time (Chung & Walsh, 2000). Froebel also stated children “need sensory experiences, develop from opportunities to study the world around them, are capable of making choices, and can benefit from playful activities” (Fromberg, 2006, p. 68).

In 1856, Margarethe Schurz opened the first Froebelian-inspired kindergarten in the United States in Wisconsin. Full day, private kindergarten was taught in German in her home for her children and the neighborhood children (Fromberg, 2006, Lee et al., 2006). This early kindergarten included the practice of “circle time” which continues today in early education (Fromberg, 2006). Tew (1998) described circle time as a whole class meeting or forum with strict rules to ensure emotional safety and respectful listening where everyone sits in a circle.

Fromberg (2006) noted the first English-speaking kindergarten in Boston was opened in 1860 by Elizabeth Peabody. Ms. Peabody was influenced by Margarethe Schurz and served middle class children in a half day program.

When the first English speaking public kindergarten opened in the United States in St. Louis in 1873, the goals and purposes quickly changed from Froebel’s metaphysical goals to the public schools’ goals of inculcating cultural values and norm (Lee et al., 2006). However, Froebel’s philosophy of educating the whole child and the importance of self directed play
largely remained intact until the 1970’s (Lee et al., 2006). Education was viewed as a process of development rather than of instruction (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). Early formal academic instruction was then viewed as detrimental to young children’s development. The public schools charged a fee for kindergarten. At that time, private kindergartens were the norm. Publicly supported kindergartens were introduced in the middle of the 20th century (Fromberg, 2006).

As the practice of kindergarten grew, changes were made in curriculum, entrance ages and duration of the school day. Fromberg (2006) stated during the second half of the 20th century, policy makers promoted academic practices to include reading, writing and arithmetic instruction to align kindergarten with primary grades. The 1990s focused on the academic importance of child development. Kindergarten classrooms began to emphasize formal reading and math similar to first grade classes rather than play and socialization (Elkind, 1987, Shepard & Smith, 1988). While private kindergarten remained flexible with entrance ages, the public kindergartens set strict age of admission and compulsory age for school attendance policies (Fromberg, 2006). While kindergarten began mostly as a full day experience, as it became more widespread, half day programs became more popular (Fromberg, 2006).

This section focused on the history of kindergarten and the kindergarten experience starting with its inception in 1837. Friedrich Froebel introduced kindergarten as a nurturing environment where children could develop their mental, social and emotional facilities through play, music and movement before starting the formal academic rigors of the academic system (Lee, et al., 2006). Froebel’s initial model for kindergarten promoted young children learning through a variety of physical manipulations and play (Williams, 1992). Froebel’s philosophy that young children think and learn differently than older children and adults was a cornerstone of early childhood education at that time (Chung and Walsh, 2000). When the first English
speaking public kindergarten opened in the United States in St. Louis in 1873, the goals and purposes quickly changed from Froebel’s metaphysical goals to the public schools’ goals of inculcating cultural values and norm (Lee et al., 2006). However Froebel’s philosophy of educating the whole child and the importance of self directed play largely remained intact until the 1970’s (Lee et al., 2006). Education was viewed as a process of development rather than of instruction (Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). As the practice of kindergarten grew, changes were made in curriculum, entrance ages and duration of the school day. Fromberg (2006) stated during the second half of the 20th century, policy makers promoted academic practices to include reading, writing and arithmetic instruction to align kindergarten with primary grades. Kindergarten classrooms began to emphasize formal reading and math similar to first grade classes rather than play and socialization (Elkind, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1988). The next section will address what the kindergarten experience looks like now.

**Kindergarten Today**

A literature review of current kindergarten programs will assist in fully understanding the many variations that exist. Despite kindergarten not being required, in the year 2000, nearly all of the 4,156,491 children eligible to attend kindergarten did; 85 % in public schools and 15% in private schools (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2000). The enrollment rate for kindergarten or first grade age children (age 5 and 6) has remained high for the past forty years: 90% enrollment in 1970, 97% enrollment in 1994 and 94% enrollment in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). A kindergarteners’ early education experience in the United States varies depending upon where they live. While each of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands all offer kindergarten they have different educational policies, state regulations and locally elected boards of education.
Public kindergartens differ in the amount of funding they receive, the required entrance age, class sizes, duration of the school day and teacher compensation, certification and qualifications (Fromberg, 2006).

If all schools are not equal, are some better than others? Researchers have attempted to define the variables that contribute to a quality school. The Coleman Report of 1966 (as cited in Goldhaber, 2002) concluded that student’s socioeconomic background was an influential factor in student performance. However among influences that can be controlled by schools, teacher quality was found to have a larger impact of student performance than all other characteristics of a school combined excluding peer effects. Goldhaber (2002) and Betts (1995) define the three commonly used measures of school quality as test scores, teacher quality and spending. Goldhaber (2002) states that research confirms high-quality teachers raise student performance. Teacher degree and experience levels are widely studied most likely because they are easy to measure and are the sole determinants of teacher’s salaries in most school districts (Goldhaber, 2002). Districts which hire teachers with more experience and education spend more money. Districts with less money available may not have that option.

**Funding Sources**

Funding sources and amounts across communities varies significantly. According to the U.S. Department of Education Research Office (2003), in 2001 Utah spent the least per pupil expenditure of $5,815.00 while the District of Columbia spent the most at $14,234.00. A study also found that per pupil expenditures often varies within school districts. Nearly half of all schools vary more than 10% above or below their school district’s average per pupil expenditure (U.S. Department of Education Research Office, 2011). Public revenue sources also vary widely
by states. The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported the following funding sources for states representing the highest and lowest percentages which are illustrated in Table 2.1:

**Table 2.1 State Public Revenue Sources for 2008-09 School Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Sources (property taxes)</th>
<th>State Sources</th>
<th>Federal Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Percentage of Total Funding</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Washington D.C. has no state revenue. Adapted from The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012).*

Overall, the data illustrates that local, state and federal sources of funding vary widely by state. Funding can impact the amount of support services, class size, curriculum and learning materials, qualifications and salaries of staff, length of the school day, maintenance of school buildings and after-school programs (Fromberg, 2006).

Entrance age requirements for kindergarten are inconsistent across the United States. All states require children to turn five either before entering or during their kindergarten year. Vermont and Connecticut have the latest cutoff dates of January 1 of their kindergarten year.
However, some states allow local school districts to determine if younger children who haven’t met the deadline can still enroll. Local school districts in Colorado, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Washington determine their own individual cutoff dates (Gelb, 2002).

Fromberg (2006) listed state policies for kindergarten class sizes with Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island and South Dakota class size limited to 15 and Kentucky and North Carolina limited to a kindergarten class size of 24. The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) illustrated the wide variation in K-12 classroom sizes by states and jurisdictions. While the average class size in the United States in the fall of 2010 was 16.01 students, the U.S. Virgin Islands and North Dakota reported the lowest class sizes, 10.6 and 11.4 respectively, and California had the largest class sizes with an average of 24.7.

The duration of a kindergartener’s day also varies widely. The Children’s Defense Fund (2012) studied the number of states offering full-day kindergarten. They categorized the states into four groups. Ten states plus Washington D.C. provide full-day kindergarten to all children at no charge per state statute and funding. Twenty-one states only require school districts to offer half-day kindergarten and cannot charge tuition. Six states do not have any state statute requiring any type of kindergarten program although many do offer half-day at a minimum. Thirteen states allow school districts to charge tuition for “the other portion of the kindergarten day”. A review of different school district websites highlighted that even half days vary from about two to four hours daily and full days ranged from five to six and a half hours. Clark (2001), Clark and Kirk (2000) and Elicker (2000) report that students who attended full day kindergartens performed better in school achievement tests and were better socialized than students who attended half day kindergartens.
The importance of teacher quality is critical. Goldhaber (2002) states that research confirms high-quality teachers raise student performance. Teacher degree and experience levels are the sole determinants of teacher’s salaries in most school districts (Goldhaber, 2002). Districts which hire teachers with more experience and education spend more money. Districts with less money may not be able to attract quality teachers. The teaching profession in general may have trouble attracting quality candidates. In general, the higher the quality of a student’s undergraduate institution, the less likely they are to choose teaching as a career (Ballou & Podgursky, 1997). Murnane (as cited in Goldhaber, 2002, p. 51) states “College graduates with high test scores are less likely to take (teaching) jobs, employed teachers with high test scores are less likely to stay, and former teachers with high test scores are less likely to return.” Reports about teachers have been united on the recommendation to raise teacher’s salaries in order to attract more capable people in to the profession (Ballou & Podgursky, 1997; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Compensation for public school kindergarten teachers aligns with other elementary school staff. Data reviewed from a compilation of educational sources and PayScale.com determined the following average pay for public school teachers in 2011 (McIntyre, Allen, Sauter, & Stockdale, 2011). Table 2.2 illustrates the highest average teacher salaries by state and Table 2.3 illustrates the lowest average teacher salaries by state.
Table 2.2 Highest Average Teacher Salaries by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$72,708</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>$65,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>$71,017</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>$63,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>$69,434</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>$61,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>$66,985</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>$60,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>$65,571</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>$60,536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from “The best- and worst-paying states for teachers” by D. McIntyre, A. Allen, M. Sauter, and C. Stockdate. 24/7 Wall St.

Table 2.3 Lowest Average Teacher Salaries by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>$35,201</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>$46,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>$44,266</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>$46,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>$46,411</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>$46,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>$46,571</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>$47,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$46,702</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>$47,080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from “The best- and worst-paying states for teachers” by D. McIntyre, A. Allen, M. Sauter, and C. Stockdate. 24/7 Wall St.

Overall the data illustrates up to a $37,507 pay difference between New York’s highest average teacher salary and South Dakota’s lowest average teacher salary of $35,201. While
literature, legislature and public opinion call for high quality teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003), no comparison data was found identifying how qualified kindergarten teachers are in the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) requires all teachers of core academic subjects to be designated as “highly qualified” in each of the core subjects they teach. Teachers are deemed “highly qualified” by meeting the following criteria: 1) possess a bachelor’s degree, 2) possess a state teaching license and 3) have demonstrated subject matter competency in each of the core subjects they are teaching. Rice (2003) identifies five measurable characteristics of teacher quality: 1) teacher experience, 2) teacher preparation programs and degrees, 3) type of teacher certification, 4) specific coursework undertaken and 5) teacher’s own test scores (literacy levels, verbal abilities, mathematical reasoning, etc.). Rice (2003) states these characteristics have been shown in research to have a positive educational outcome for students.

Much of the current research in early childhood education and kindergarten today focuses either on reading instruction (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Bursuck, Munk, Nelson & Curran, 2002; Bursuck, et al., 2004; Cooke, Kretlow & Helf, 2010; Elliott & Olliff, 2008) or how to balance increased curriculum demands with a developmental philosophy (Ableser, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Curwood, 2007; Goldstein, 1998; Graue, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Kotansky, 2003; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Williamson, Bondy, Langley & Mayne, 2005). There is substantial debate among parents, early childhood educators and policy makers about the purposes and goals of kindergarten and the optimum method to achieve these goals (Vecchiotti, 2001). The “traditional” model of kindergarten emphasizes educating the whole child by promoting learning through play and socialization (Lee, et al., 2006, p. 106). Children will gain social, emotional and academic skills through their natural curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. The opposing
philosophy is that kindergarten should prepare children for first grade academics by teaching formal structured lessons (Lee et al., p. 106). The earlier acquisition of discrete skills such as reading and math allows the students to better achieve in school. Advocates for a “developmentally appropriate” kindergarten are criticized for underestimating children’s capacity to learn concepts and skills (Bursuck, et al., 2004; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Advocates for a “formal kindergarten” are criticized for ignoring school readiness and narrowing the curriculum (Elkind, 1987; Miller & Almon, 2009). While kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in most states (Education Commission of the States, n.d.), the majority of students attend an all day kindergarten (Miller, 2005; Noble & Kedzior, 2003). Over the years, kindergarten participation has increased to where most five year olds attend (Vecchiotti, 2001). Shepard and Smith (1988) attributed this gradual and continuous escalation of the early grades curriculum as a response to nearly universal kindergarten attendance, educational television such as “Sesame Street” raising the norms, increased expectations from parents and escalating district guidelines. More recent articles (Ableser, 2008; Kotansky, 2003) credit the increased academic demands to high stakes testing and rising state standards. Lee, et al. (2006) and Shepard and Smith (1988) state that policymakers are pressuring for increased cognitive demands in kindergarten. Goldstein (2007) and Stipek (2006) state the appearance of early childhood education is dramatically changing within a world of high-stakes testing. Miller (2006) states that kindergarten has radically changed in the past twenty years. Few Americans are aware that children now spend far more time being instructed and tested on literacy and math than they do exercising their bodies, using their imaginations and learning through exploration and play (Miller, 2006). Educational mandates are greatly shifting the dynamics and principles of teaching in early childhood classrooms across America (Lloyd, 2012). Stipek (2006) proposes
the pressure to increase academic performance may lead teachers to overlook the physical, social and emotional developmental domains which are critical to teaching the whole child. Drill and skill activities are often associated with the faster-is-better, high-stakes world of education. These philosophical differences produce very different looking kindergarten classes. While many classrooms attempt to blend the two extremes, Table 2.4 illustrates how Fromberg (2006) presents these examples of how the two philosophies translate into different teaching practices. Overall, the data illustrates two different ways of teaching kindergarten.

| Table 2.4 A Continuum Comparison of Predominant conditions of Learning in Academic and Intellectual Kindergartens |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Academic** (formal) | **Intellectual** (traditional) |
| Children adapt | School adapts |
| Child is passive | Child is active |
| Child is dependent | Child is autonomous |
| Whole group instruction | Small group and individual instruction |
| Individual tasks | Small group cooperation, individual tasks |
| Present material is covered | Children’s capacity to learn is extended |
| 3Rs instructional focus | Concepts and applied skills are the focus |
| Separate subjects | Integrated subjects |
| Workbooks | Concrete materials and quality literature |
| Verbal, informational | Constructivist, problem-solving emphasis |
| Single correct answers | Alternative solutions generated |
| Holiday rituals marked | Multicultural content through social experience |
| Uniform, standardized assessment for closure | Multiple forms of assessment |

Elementary students today including kindergarteners receive less recess time than in the past. Schachter (2005) notes as standards have increased; the traditional practice of recess has shrunk in 40 percent of school districts across the country. Administrators have been attempting to balance the rising academic needs with student’s needs to have breaks from their classroom rigors. Pellegrini and Smith (1993) describe recess or play time as a break period for children built into the school day typically held outdoors. They researched the educational role of recess especially its cognitive implications. They found relatively little empirical research on recess. However the existing research consistently supported recess as having educational value. Boys especially benefitted from social cognitive development during recess time (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993)

The kindergarten experience today in the United States varies widely depending upon where the student lives. While each of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands all offer kindergarten they have different educational policies, state regulations and locally elected boards of education (Fromberg, 2006). Public kindergartens differ in the amount of funding they receive, the required entrance age, class sizes, duration of the school day and teacher compensation, certification and qualifications (Fromberg, 2006). Goldhaber (2002) and Betts (1995) define the three commonly used measures of school quality as test scores, teacher quality and spending. Goldhaber (2002) states that research confirms high-quality teachers raise student performance. Teacher degree and experience levels are the sole determinants of teacher’s salaries in most school districts (Goldhaber, 2002). Clark (2001), Clark and Kirk (2000) and Elicker (2000) report that students who attended full day kindergartens performed better in school achievement tests and were better socialized than students who attended half day kindergartens. Lee, et al. (2006) and Shepard and Smith (1988)
state that policymakers are pressuring for increased cognitive demands in kindergarten. Goldstein (2007) and Stipek (2006) state the appearance of early childhood education is dramatically changing within a world of high-stakes testing. Miller (2006) states kindergarten has radically changed in the past twenty years. Educational mandates are greatly shifting the dynamics and principles of teaching in early childhood classrooms across America (Lloyd, 2012). The next section will examine how political and social influences have changed the kindergarten experience.

**Political Influences on Kindergarten**

Significant political and social influences on kindergarten are typically described as legislation which utilizes high-stakes testing as an instrument of reform (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Curwood, 2007; Earley, 2000; Elkind, 1989; Fromberg, 2006; Graue, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Kotansky, 2003; Miller & Almon, 2009; Pipho, 2000; Russell, 2011; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Williamson, et al., 2005), parental pressure (Fromberg, 2006; Fung, 2009; Goldstein, 1998; Graue, 2009; Lee, et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1988) and the media (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Russell, 2011).

Political pressures for curriculum change also vary across the country. While No Child Left Behind is a federal act, states have enacted their own legislation to enforce school accountability. Understanding the reasons for curriculum change allows one to comprehend the rationale behind the current goals and purposes of kindergarten. The wide spread use of standardized tests for high-stakes decision making is a controversial subject. High-stakes testing is describing tests that have serious consequences for students, teachers, schools and school districts such as retention, school ratings and monetary incentives (Jones & Egley, 2004). Using
tests as a means of demanding accountability is an appealing political strategy that effectively conveys public accountability (Supovitz, 2009). This is a time of strong public and political support for the use of high-stakes testing to positively change the behavior of teachers and students (Lee & Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006). The United States has demonstrated that testing has become a widely utilized instrument for educational reform in America (Supovitz, 2009). However the use of these tests are not new and their effects are not always desirable (Lee & Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006). Testing has been used as an administrative mechanism to implement, drive and monitor public policy for many centuries (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993).

Madaus and Kellaghan (1993) noted the first known example of testing being used as a social, administrative, bureaucratic technological technique was the establishment of a Chinese civil service examination in 210 BC. The Han dynasty designed a series of extremely competitive examinations along with standardized administration and scoring procedures in order to consolidate government, prevent patronage and select men worthy of government offices. From the 16th century on, Chinese ideas about using written examinations to complement or supplant oral exams influenced Europeans.

In 1845, Horace Mann replaced the viva voce (Latin for by word of mouth) exam with printed essay tests in the Boston public schools. The essay exam soon became the predominant mode of testing for the rest of the century (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993). Our current faith in and reliance on tests has been traced to the launching of Sputnik in 1957. When the Soviet Union beat the United States to space, journalist and politicians seriously questioned the American educational system (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).
The modern educational reform movement has been traced to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Historically, the federal government had left educational matters to state and local decision makers. Now federal dollars would have a role in public schooling policies (Duffy, et al., 2008). By the late 1970’s, there was a public concern that American students were falling behind their foreign counterparts educationally. In an effort to keep the American economy afloat, the federal government set about examining the quality of education in the schools in the United States (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report entitled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform” is considered the seminal article on high-stakes testing and public school accountability in the United States. After this publication, the states took the lead in addressing suggested reforms and shifting to tougher academic standards, adding more course requirements, longer school days and changing teacher preparation programs (Duffy, et al., 2008).

Duffy, et al. (2008) describe A Nation at Risk as the most influential report on education in the past few decades. It called for reform to raise the nation’s standards of achievement drastically by ending the minimum competency testing movement and implementing a high-stakes testing movement. Despite history finding the report to be inaccurate, it triggered a nationwide panic regarding the weakening condition of our school systems (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Bracey (2003) claims this flawed twenty year-old report still exerts a strong influence on education policymakers today, as evidenced in the No Child Left Behind Act.

A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) summarized research papers and public hearings and reportedly found multiple problems with education in the United States. The report divided their findings based on content, time, expectations and
teaching. In terms of content, it was reported that students were no longer taking challenging courses. “Curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.3). The commission felt there were three disturbing trends concerning time: American children spend much less time on homework than students from other nations; class time and homework is often used ineffectively; and schools are not adequately developing good study skills. They reported the expectations for mathematics were minimal and student grades were improving despite declining time spent on homework and average student achievement. Regarding teaching, the commission was concerned with the serious shortage of qualified teachers in key fields, the quality of teacher candidates and the unacceptable professional working life of teachers (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). While this report did not directly address kindergarten, it is widely viewed as the reason for public concern about education and the call for accountability (Airasian, 1988; Bracey, 2003; Madaus & Kelleghan, 1993). Bracey (2003) states despite flaws in the 20-year-old report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, that the report still exerts a strong influence on education policymakers today.

Within several years, testing reform took on a symbolic value in reassuring a nervous public that action was at last being taken to improve school systems. Testing results were used to meet the consumer demand for credentialing or accountability (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993). Researchers such as Airasian (1988) and Madaus and Kellaghan (1993) cautioned educators and the public that the popularity of high-stakes testing as an instrument of educational policy was due to its symbolic representation of order and control not due to objective research. In fact, the likely effects of educational innovations are rarely established before they are adopted (Airasian,
1988). Research had already determined that the state testing programs of the 1970’s and 1980’s had a negative effect on students, teachers, instruction and learning (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993).

While the politicians and public were supportive of high-stakes testing, Smith (1991) and Jones and Egley (2004) researched teacher’s perceptions of high-stakes testing. Numerous negative effects of testing were reported on both teachers such as shame, embarrassment, guilt, anger, stress and fear and on schools including a substantial reduction in instruction time, a narrowing of curricular offerings and modes of instruction and a potential reduction in the capacity of teachers to teach beyond the test (Smith, 1991). Jones and Egley (2004) questioned 708 Florida teachers about whether the state’s high-stakes testing was taking schools in the right direction and why. Most teachers felt the testing was taking schools in the wrong direction due to the improper use of the test, negative effects on curriculum and motivation and the problem that it was not an accurate assessment. However, teachers were not opposed to accountability, just to the manner of implementation (Jones & Egley, 2004).

During this same period of time, Amrein and Berliner (2002) studied the impact on student learning of 18 states utilizing high-stakes testing. The findings determined that in all but one case, high-stakes testing was not shown to improve student learning or in some instances actually decreases student learning. Despite the lack of objective support, the testing reform movement continued to grow. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) helped to fuel the cries for accountability. The government produced a series of annual reports to recount on the long term effects of the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Policy, 2006). Even these reports found mixed results. While stating urban districts had the greatest effects, it reported little change in teacher quality and a reduction in
time to teach social studies, science, art and music. Independent research (Lee & Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006) doing a trend analysis of fourth and eight grader’s reading and math results both pre-No Child Left Behind and post-No Child Left Behind were even less supportive. Lee & Harvard Civil Rights Project (2006) reported No Child Left Behind has not made an impact. National reading scores remain flat and math scores grow at the same pace as before. He concludes No Child Left Behind has not helped narrow the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap and both current data and data on the first generation accountability states is misleading (Lee & Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006).

As the research continued to find high-stakes testing was not achieving its intended goal, its popularity with the politicians and public continued. As the implementation of high-stakes testing continued to grow, the current research tended towards two areas – researching the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing and researching how to live with the reality of high-stakes testing while minimizing its shortcomings. The next section will examine the research on the consequences of high stakes testing.

Consequences of High Stakes Testing

Many current research articles document negative unintended consequences of high-stakes testing (Berliner, 2009; Jones, 2007; Jones & Egley, 2004; Smith, 1991; Wright and Li, 2008). Jones (2007) determined that while some unintended outcomes of high-stakes testing has been positive, many of the unintended outcomes have been negative such as the aligning of the curriculum to the test, a reduction in student and teacher motivation, the cost of utilizing high-stakes testing and the negative effects on students-at-risk. Wright and Li (2008) analyzed the policy of requiring English Language Learner (ELL) students to take the math tests even if the
student has been in the country for less than a year. They determined the policy does not provide time to learn math content or take into account the linguistic demands of an ELL student and should be changed. Berliner (2009) examined the relationships between high-stakes testing, curriculum and the economic needs of the United States. He determined that while high-stakes testing was intended as a way to improve our nation, it may end up weakening us. The unintended negative consequences of high-stakes testing include a narrowing of the curriculum and less time devoted to teaching the arts, humanities, creativity and critical thinking skills.

Other researchers (Duffy, et al., 2008; Longo, 2010; Supovitz, 2009) document negative effects of high-stakes testing and make suggestion on how to meet the demands of standardized testing despite its negative consequences. Duffy et al. (2008) call for stakeholders to critically reflect on NCLB’s unstated values, preferences and beliefs. They present a brief history of education reform in order to comprehend how high-stakes testing became the gold standard for measuring student progress at the expense of more holistic nonquantitative assessments. They call for school counselors to be alert to and advocate against mandated testing’s negative consequences. Supovitz (2009) states high-stakes testing results in superficial changes to content coverage and has limited use for instructional guidance. He suggests ways to capitalize on the strengths of testing while minimizing its weaknesses. Longo (2010) examines how to balance proven inquiry-based science instruction which promotes creativity with the requirements of high-stakes testing methods. He proposes that regardless of state mandates, science teachers must deliver a curriculum that is motivating, aligned to state frameworks and applicable to real-life. Only then is it acceptable to teach to the test.

Research has shown high-stakes testing has increased the increased academic demands in kindergarten (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Curwood, 2007; Earley, 2000; Elkind,
1989; Fromberg, 2006; Graue, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Kotansky, 2003; Miller and Almon, 2009; Pipho, 2000; Russell, 2011; Shepard and Smith, 1988; Williamson, et al, 2005). Many authors such as Elkind (1987, 1989), Miller and Almon (2009), Shepard and Smith (1988), and Vecchiotti (2001) have concurred that the focus on increased academic demands has a negative impact on kindergarten students. Other authors such as Ableser (2008), Bodrova and Leong (2008) and Hamre and Pianta (2005) focus on instructional changes in order to support young children’s social-emotion development in today’s classroom. It would be important to seek research which supports increased academic demands. Research has also investigated meeting the challenges of high-stakes testing while remaining child-centered. Williamson, et al (2005) state current education policies aimed at accountability create pressing dilemmas for many educators. Further exploration into these bodies of literature will promote a better understanding which is necessary to investigate this problem of educational practice.

Educators, researchers, pediatricians and scientists actively voice their concerns about the “crisis in kindergarten”. The increased academic demands requires teachers to spend more time teaching reading, writing and math and less time teaching social skills. Curwood (2007) states that these “academic kindergartens” are more likely to promote skill-and-drill exercises and regular homework rather than imaginative playtime. Learning to read used to be typically mastered some time during first grade. Now students are considered below grade level if they aren’t reading by the end of the kindergarten year. Schools may be requiring skills which some students are not developmentally ready for. Miller and Almon (2009) state kindergartners are under the double burden of great pressure to achieve inappropriate expectations and are being denied the benefits of play which is a major stress reliever. They state many researchers believe this dilemma is contributing to a rise in anger and aggression as reflected in reports of severe
behavior problems. Some students may be unable to meet the academic demands and most students may be missing out on important skills that were previously taught in kindergarten. “When we ask our younger children to ‘produce’, to perform intellectual feats once considered the domain of grade school, what’s being sacrificed?” (Kotansky, 2003, p. 20).

**Societal and Parental Pressures**

Societal and parental pressures have also significantly influenced kindergarten. Cuban (1992) identified child saving as the primary reason given by urban reformers for the mission of kindergarten at its inception. Religious groups, temperance organizations, settlement houses and philanthropists viewed kindergarten as a reform to solve urban problems. The purpose was to rescue families from poverty, crime, improve race relations and transform immigrants into citizens and hard working parents. Fromberg (2006) concur that social service agencies and religious institutions provided free kindergarten for working families. The child study movement at the turn of the 20th century aligned with the International Kindergarten Union which later becomes the National Association for the Education of Young Children in 1964 to promote kindergarten. During the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government funded kindergarten and preschool programs to create jobs for teachers and child care for working families during the war time (Fromberg, 2006). As our troops returned from war, women were displaced in the work force. Interest was heightened in the predominantly half day kindergartens serving the stay at home moms when in 1957 the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. This created a public concern whether children in the United States would be able to remain competitive with the world’s technology and economy (Fromberg, 2006).
Lee et al. (2006) cited other societal pressures such as the rejection of the principles of progressive education, emerging research on cognitive growth in young children, the growing importance of quality early childhood education to middle class parents and programs to enrich poor children such as Head Start. As time progressed, the number of working mothers with children under six grew. Full day kindergartens better served the child care and scheduling needs of these parents (Lee, et al, 2006). As early childhood education became more common, parents pressured for more academically based work in kindergarten (Cuban, 1992; Fromberg, 2006; Fung, 2009; Goldstein, 1998; Lee at al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1988).

Media Influence

A final influence on kindergarten researched was the media. Edwards and Wood (1999) studied who influences who amongst the president of the United States, congress and the media. Despite public opinion that the president influences congress and the media, they determined most of the time presidents react to fluctuations in media attention. Russell (2011) studied media coverage of kindergarten education from the 1950’s and discovered shifting institutional logics based on the way kindergarten is portrayed. From the 1950s until the 1980s, the vast majority of articles in the Los Angeles Times and New York Times were consistent with developmental logic. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the articles were equally split between a developmental approach and an academic approach. In the 2000s, there were twice as many articles promoting an academic approach versus a developmental approach. Earley (2000) states legislative demands for accountability when schools are viewed as not meeting expectations lead to a search for culprits. The National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future report (1996) and the media attention, lead the teacher education system to been blamed. Critics argued the
recommendation would not lead to the desired transformation. However when the media attention to the report declined, criticism of teacher education remained.

**Research on Play Based Curriculums**

Supporters of developmentally appropriate practices claim the policy shift negatively impacts students. Miller and Almon (2009) state “it is increasingly clear that they are compromising both children’s health and their long-term prospects for success in school”. A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics reported too little time for unstructured play leads to increased stress for children and parents (Ginsburg, 2007). Brain research supports the importance of developing and implementing a positive learning environment which utilizes a child-centered curriculum (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). A conclusion of this study is it is becoming increasingly difficult to align best practices to the brain’s natural chemistry given today’s high-stakes testing arena. Elkind (1987) states “when we teach young children the wrong material at the wrong time, we put them at risk for short-term stress and long-term personality problems”. He believes “miseducation” is so damaging because a young child’s attitudes towards themselves, learning and school are molded in their first three years of schooling. If those years are unsuccessful, it is difficult to undo the negative effects later. The Alliance for Childhood has issued a “Call to Action on the Education of Young Children”. More than 150 leading educators, physicians and experts have signed calling for a reversal of educational polices that emphasize formal instruction in favor of child-initiated play (National School Boards Association, 2006).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s position paper (2009) states play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, language, cognition and social
competence. Miller and Almon (2009) promote play as a major stress reliever and fosters creativity which major business corporations are saying are the future of the U.S. economy. Kotansky (2003) states five year old children are the most engaged, productive and able to solve problems when they are playing. Ginsberg (2007, p. 182) and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly support the need for play. “Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child.” The report addresses the markedly reduced time in today’s society for free play. It cites play as being essential to development. It contributes to the physical, social, cognitive and emotional growth of children. The report encourages pediatricians to advocate for children by teaching families, school systems and communities the importance of protecting play time to create optimal development.

Research in the field of neuroscience (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008) support the importance of child centered curriculums which include the use of play as a tool for learning in primary age students. Effective teachers support brain development in students by encouraging them to make their own discoveries. Diamond and Hopson (1998) state while play may appear to the untrained eye to merely be play, it is actually incorporating opportunities to learn through socialization and differentiated curriculum. The approaches of integrated-thematic studies, whole language and manipulative math activities develop the whole child while promoting greater growth of the synaptic connections between brain cells. “One of the many parts of our responsibilities as early as childhood educators is to craft a child-centered learning environment that stimulates the child’s interests, optimizes the brain’s ability to understand, absorb, and most importantly, retain information” (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008, p. 89). The brain’s natural chemistry works best in a safe, valued classroom. Students who are fearful, anxious or working
hard on non-emotional mental tasks inhibit the amygdale which inhibits learning (Carter, 1998; Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). Frost (1998, p.8-9) states research which shows the importance of play for brain growth and child development. Five fundamental principles that have considerable support from play scholars and neuro-scientists are:

1. All healthy young mammals play.

2. The range and complexity of play quickly increase as neurons start hardwiring connections at a remarkable rate.

3. The early games and frivolity of animals and humans equip them for the skills they will need later in life.

4. Play is essential for healthy development.

5. Play deprivation results in aberrant behavior.

Wenner (2009) studied both the need for play and the effects of lack of play. The article stressed the importance of children’s free play. “Free, imaginative play is crucial for normal social, emotional and cognitive development. It makes us better adjusted, smarter and less stressed” (Wenner, 2009, p 22). The unstructured, creative part of free play is important because it challenges more brain development than playing with predetermined rules (Wenner, 2009). Wenner (2009) also found studies that support that play deprived children experience disrupted social, emotional and cognitive developments. Brown interviewed twenty-six convicted Texas murderers. He discovered two commonalities in most of the killers: they were raised in abusive families and they never played as children (Wenner, 2009).
Research on Skill Based Curriculums

Research on the importance of a skill based curriculum was not found. The research in this area tended to focus on how to best achieve the goals of a skill based curriculum especially reading (Bursuck, et al., 2002; Chard & Dickson, 1999; Cooke, et al., 2010; Hamre & Pianta, 2005) or how to blend a skill based curriculum with a child centered philosophy (Ablesler, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Goldstein, 1998; Graue, 2009; Kotansky, 2003; Williamson et al., 2005).

The literature on skill based curriculums in kindergarten focused mainly on reading. Bursuck, et al. (2002) note that a national goal is to have all students read independently by the end of third grade. They promote preventing or minimizing reading problems by having kindergarten and first grade teachers use reading programs with explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and word identification skills. Chard and Dickson (1999) concur that teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness to young students can assist in preventing or correcting reading difficulties. Cooke et al. (2010) studied how early should supplemental reading start for kindergarten students. The results showed students benefitted from receiving supplementary reading instruction throughout their kindergarten year. Hamre and Pianta (2005) studied if instructional and emotional support in first grade could improve achievement and teacher-student relationships in a group of students identified as at risk in kindergarten. Students provided with strong instructional and emotional support did perform better. This study differed from the majority of skill based curriculum studies in that it included emotional support and measured teacher-student relationships rather than reading scores.
The studies on blending a skill based curriculum with a child centered philosophy took a realistic approach. They attempted to balance their child centered philosophy of early childhood education with district and state mandates. Several studies examined how to best implement an academic curriculum from a child centered philosophy. Graue (2004) and Kotansky (2003) considered a kindergarten curriculum. Goldstein (1998) studied a first grade curriculum. Williamson et al. (2005) studied teachers in the third and fifth grade. Elliott and Olliff (2008) focused on the advancement of pre-reading and writing skills in preschool to prepare students for kindergarten. Bodrova and Leong (2008) note that teaching self regulation skills in kindergarten is essential especially given the increased academic demands. They note research shows self regulation skills in the early years is a better predictor than IQ scores of future school achievement in math and reading. Ablesler (2008) looked at how to balance kindergarten through grade three curriculum demands while addressing student’s social and emotional needs especially during times of stress or crisis. The National Association for the Education of Young Children Position Statement (2009) states there is a relationship between emotional and social factors and children’s academic competence.

Barrows (2009) compared teaching methods in the medical field. The lecture based method was found to be the least expensive in terms of cost, time, effort for teachers and curriculum designers and amount of teaching skills and materials required. In comparison, problem based learning does not refer to a specific educational method. It varies depending upon interpretation and the skills of the teachers. The variables can produce wide variations in achieved objectives and the quality of the lessons. Despite the drawbacks, Barrows (2009) promotes problem based learning.
Conclusion

The literature review focused on multiple areas of research: the history of kindergarten, what the kindergarten experience looks like today and how politics, societal and parental pressures and the media have influenced the kindergarten experience. Friedrich Froebel introduced the first kindergarten in 1837 as a nurturing environment where children could develop their mental, social and emotional facilities through play, music and movement before starting the formal academic rigors of the academic system (Lee, et al., 2006). Froebel’s developmental philosophy embodied Piaget’s essential element for learning that children construct reality via physical manipulation of the environment and then through symbolic representation (Singer & Revenson, 1997) and Vygotsky’s (1962) conviction that social problem solving and expressing feelings is the essence of cognition. As the practice of kindergarten grew, changes were made in curriculum, entrance ages and duration of the school day and philosophy.

The kindergarten experience today in the United States varies widely depending upon where the student lives. Public kindergartens differ in the amount of funding they receive, the required entrance age, class sizes, duration of the school day and teacher compensation, certification and qualifications (Fromberg, 2006). Earley (2000) states legislative demands for accountability when schools are viewed as not meeting expectations lead to a search for culprits. A Nation at Risk report (1983) and The National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future report (1996) and the media attention lead the teacher education system to been blamed and helped fuel the cries for accountability and high stakes testing. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) provided federal monies to schools and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) called for an increase in standards of accountability. Despite research continuing to find
high-stakes testing was not achieving its intended goal, its popularity with the politicians and public continued. Research has shown high-stakes testing has increased the increased academic demands in kindergarten (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Curwood, 2007; Earley, 2000; Elkind, 1989; Fromberg, 2006; Graue, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Kotansky, 2003; Miller and Almon, 2009; Pipho, 2000; Russell, 2011; Shepard and Smith, 1988; Williamson, et al, 2005).

Supporters of developmentally appropriate practices claim the policy shift negatively impacts students. Miller and Almon (2009) state “it is increasingly clear that they are compromising both children’s health and their long-term prospects for success in school”. A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics reported too little time for unstructured play leads to increased stress for children and parents (Ginsburg, 2007). Brain research supports the importance of developing and implementing a positive learning environment which utilizes a child-centered curriculum (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). A conclusion of this study is it is becoming increasingly difficult to align best practices to the brain’s natural chemistry given today’s high-stakes testing arena. Piaget’s stages of development and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development remind educators that curriculums need to be developmentally appropriate in order for learning to take place. Kindergarten students cannot be expected to learn curriculum that is either too far away from their current skill level or not in their current stage of development. Both theorists agree that language and play are vital for a kindergarten student to learn. Research on the importance of a skill based curriculum was not found. The research in this area tended to focus on how to best achieve the goals of a skill based curriculum especially reading (Bursuck, et al., 2002; Chard & Dickson, 1999; Cooke, et al., 2010; Hamre & Pianta, 2005) or how to blend a skill based curriculum with a child centered philosophy (Ablesler, 2008;
Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Goldstein, 1998; Graue, 2009; Kotansky, 2003; Williamson et al., 2005).
Chapter Three: Research Design

Research Design

The research method that provided the most appropriate lens to capture what has happened with the kindergarten experience over time was qualitative historical research. Goodson (1985) stressed the prime purpose of studying the history was to address current educational problems. The educational problem being addressed is the substantial debate among parents, early childhood educators and policy makers about the purposes and goals of kindergarten and the optimum method to achieve these goals (Vecchiotti, 2001). The “traditional” model of kindergarten emphasizes educating the whole child by promoting learning through play and socialization (Lee, et al., 2006, p. 106). Children will gain social, emotional and academic skills through their natural curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. An alternative philosophy is that kindergarten should prepare children for first grade academics by teaching formal structured lessons (Lee et al., p. 106). The earlier acquisition of discrete skills such as reading and math allows the students to better achieve in school. Advocates for a “developmentally appropriate” kindergarten are criticized for underestimating children’s capacity to learn concepts and skills (Bursuck, et al., 2004; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Advocates for a “formal kindergarten” are criticized for ignoring school readiness and narrowing the curriculum (Elkind, 1987; Miller & Almon, 2009). While kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in most states (Education Commission of the States, n.d.), the majority of students attend an all day kindergarten (Miller, 2005; Noble & Kedzior, 2003). Over the years, kindergarten participation has increased to where most five year olds attend (Vecchiotti, 2001). Shepard and Smith (1988) attributed this gradual and continuous escalation of the early grades curriculum as a response to nearly universal kindergarten attendance, educational television such
as “Sesame Street” raising the norms, increased expectations from parents and escalating district guidelines. More recent articles (Ableser, 2008; Kotansky, 2003) credit the increased academic demands to high stakes testing and rising state standards. Lee, et al. (2006) and Shepard and Smith (1988) state that policymakers are pressuring for increased cognitive demands in kindergarten. This study researched the historical literature to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. The study was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001).

Research Questions

Primary: How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?

Secondary: How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?

Attitudes and beliefs regarding the purposes, goals and curriculum for kindergarten instruction have changed over time. In order to document these changes, the primary research question allowed the researcher to explore the attitudes and beliefs toward the kindergarten experience at different periods of time beginning with the mid 1800’s leading up to today.

The secondary question addressed how political and social influences have impacted attitudes and beliefs about kindergarten which in turn transformed the experience and impacted the kindergarten curriculum. Advocates say current early education policies are based on
unproven methods rather than research based practices and are fueled by political pressures rather than educational knowledge (National School Boards Association, 2006). It is important for educators to understand from a historical perspective how kindergarten instruction was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of society at various time periods. How do five year olds learn best? This question was explored based on the attitudes and norms present in various points of history. Learning more about the history, changes and purposes of kindergarten including political and social pressures for curriculum changes illustrated how and why the kindergarten experience has changed.

**Methodology**

The research method that provided the most appropriate lens to capture what has happened with kindergarten instruction over time is historical research. It is important for educators to understand from a historical perspective how kindergarten instruction was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of society at various time periods. The process of understanding the background of attitudes and beliefs regarding curriculum changes through a detailed analysis of historical data can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends and future possibilities ("The Historical Approach", n.d.). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) note multiple purposes for historical research: to make people aware of what has happened in the past to learn from failures and successes; to determine if former solutions might be applicable to present day problems; to predict; to test relational hypotheses and to more fully understand current educational practices. Howell and Prevenier (2001) state that most historians in the West study change over time in a linear fashion:

And all change occurs, historians ineluctably assume, for some reason, even if
that reason may not turn out to be rational. Whether they acknowledge it or not, historians thus presume cause when they write history, for to produce a chronology of any kind is in some way to locate causality in chronology. (p. 127)

While historians may hope to show a causal relationship between events described, they must not accept sources explanations without investigation. In the end, historians should propose their own explanations of causality (Howell & Prevenier, 2001).

Busha and Harter (1980) present six essential steps for conducting historical research:

1. The recognition of a historical problem or identification of a need for historical knowledge.

2. The locating of as much relevant sources of historical information as possible.

3. If appropriate, the forming of a hypothesis that tentatively explains relationships between historical factors.

4. The rigorous collection and organization of evidence and the verification of authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.

5. The selection, organization and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence and the drawing of conclusions, and

6. The recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative. (p. 91)
These essential steps guided this research. The kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience have been identified as an educational problem warranting historical knowledge.

**Value of Historical Research**

Miller and Almon (2009) refer to the current kindergarten experience as a crisis. An empirical study or descriptive history of kindergarten curriculum introduces a more objective presentation. An in-depth exploration of facts, details and comparisons of documents along a timeline enable the reader to distinguish events and identify significant variations in an event (Danto, 2008). William H. Payne, from the University of Michigan, valued studying the history of education and insisted it has “uses which are general and comprehensive” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 74). Missing from the historical literature is the extent to which government policies and legislation have framed the kindergarten curriculum and research on the outcomes of those changes. The context of the evolution of kindergarten instruction will be framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The government and its policies appear to have greatly influenced kindergarten over the years (Russell, 2011; Sandfort et al., 2008). In 1837, the first private kindergarten opened with the philosophy of Froebel’s metaphysical goals (Shepard & Smith, 1988). When the first public kindergarten in the United States opened in 1873, the goals changed to inculcating cultural values and norms (Lee, et al., 2006). The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 represented the first time federal dollars had a role in public school policies (Duffy et al., 2008). The A Nation at Risk report of 1983 declared a crisis in American education (Bracey, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act
called for accountability through teacher quality and high-stakes testing (Elmore, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003). The process of understanding the background of the kindergarten experience through a detailed analysis of historical data can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends and future possibilities (“The Historical Approach”, n.d.).

**Participants**

This research study examined three southeastern Massachusetts public school districts. The sampling strategy of choosing districts was to provide maximum variation and ability to gain access to the research sites. The names of the districts and people were changed to allow for confidentiality. The East Haven Public School district is located in a large, urban, industrial city with 40.23 square miles. The Grayling Public School district is located in a smaller, coastal, suburban community with 54.4 square miles. The third district, Ponderosa Public School district is located in a small rural island town of 105.3 square miles. All three districts have full day kindergarten classes with a required entrance age of five years of age for the school year during which students intend to enroll. Students in the East Haven school district and the Ponderosa school district need to be age five as of September 1 for the year they intend to enroll in kindergarten. The Grayling school district has a cut-off date of August 31. All three districts qualify for Title One funding. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Title One program provides funds to local school districts to improve the education of disadvantaged students (No Child Left Behind Act, n.d.). It is the largest federal program supporting elementary and secondary education. The goal is to help ensure all students meet challenging state academic standards by providing financial assistance to school districts with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families The districts are located in southeastern Massachusetts in two different counties. The
East Haven Public Schools is located in Bristol County while the Grayling Public Schools
district and the Ponderosa Public School district are located in Barnstable County. However
none of the districts are close to each other. Table 3.1 shows a comparison of the three
participating school districts using school data from the 2012 – 2013 school year.

**Table 3.1  Comparison of Participating School Districts 2012-13 Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East Haven</th>
<th>Grayling</th>
<th>Ponderosa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population City/Town</td>
<td>88,857</td>
<td>31,531</td>
<td>10,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>10,138</td>
<td>3,536</td>
<td>1,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Students</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Classes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in District</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Class Size</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>13.8/1</td>
<td>12.3/1</td>
<td>11.8/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability/Assistance Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Enrollment</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Needs Students</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditures</td>
<td>$13,550</td>
<td>$14,216</td>
<td>$20,854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the data indicates the school districts and host communities provide variation in size, student/teacher ratio, 4 year graduation rate, accountability/assistance level, minority enrollment, high needs students and per pupil expenditures.

The districts also differ in their political structures. The school committee members in all three communities are elected by the community to serve on the board. The town of Grayling has nine school committee members and the town of Ponderosa has five members with the chairperson being elected amongst themselves. The city of East Haven has seven members with six of them being elected but the chairperson of the committee is the mayor of the city. During school committee meetings in the Grayling and Ponderosa school districts, community members are allowed to attend and speak about school concerns. The school committee meeting notes for East Haven only listed public comments once (East Haven School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, September 8). People who wanted to make comments about parochial schools at that particular meeting were required to put their comments in writing prior to the meetings. Howard Abbott, East Haven school committee member (personal communication, August 19, 2013) clarified School Committee meetings do follow the Open Meeting Law where the public must be allowed to attend. There is a public input agenda item at meetings. At that time the public can address the committee. This was recently changed to limit comments to agenda items only as recommended by a state monitor. The school district of East Haven is also unique from the other two districts in that it has a strong relationship with its local parochial schools and some school staff are hired via the Civil Service process (East Haven School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, August 31). Both Annual School Reports of the City of East Haven from 1892 on and the East Haven School Committee Meeting Notes from 1924 on consistently provided
information on parochial student enrollment numbers whenever providing public school numbers.

While the districts are all in southeastern Massachusetts, they are not close to each other. Even though the Grayling Public School district and the Ponderosa Public School district are both in Barnstable county, they are geographically distanced and all three districts take at least an hour to travel between.

Table 3.2 shows the geographic distance and travel time between the three school districts.

**Table 3.2 Travel Time and Miles Between School Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Districts</th>
<th>Approximate Miles</th>
<th>Approximate Travel Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Haven to Grayling</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Haven to Ponderosa</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3 hours 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grayling to East Haven</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grayling to Ponderosa</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2 hours 46 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponderosa to East Haven</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3 hours 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponderosa to Grayling</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2 hours 46 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The approximate travel time listed above includes taking a ferry to and from Ponderosa.

The table data indicates the school districts are between 50 to 89 miles apart. Travel between the school districts would require between an hour to three hours and 15 minutes.
Since this researcher is employed by the Grayling Public School district, access to records in that district was easy to obtain. The researcher sent an e-mail to the superintendent asking permission to research school documents concerning the history of kindergarten in the district. The superintendent promptly gave approval. Historical records such as school committee meeting notes were kept in binders in the superintendent’s office. The district had meeting notes readily available from 1937-2012. The researcher was given permission to stay after hours to read through records. At first, the researcher left by the time the night custodian left but eventually was given permission to stay later and lock up the building when done. Office staff frequently stopped to inquire as to what was needed and offered any information or paperwork they had.

Gaining access to the school records for the East Haven Public School district was more difficult. The researcher eventually submitted a written request to view records and was directed to the School Committee secretary. After finally setting an agreed upon time and date, the researcher was assisted by the custodian. The school committee meeting notes from 1924-2003 are kept in a boiler room in the basement of an old building. The room was noisy, dusty, cold and secluded. The custodian volunteered his work and cell number to assist with getting access to the records and finding parking on the street. Other valuable resources were located at the East Haven Historical Society.

Gaining access to the school records for the Ponderosa Public School district was the most difficult. After an e-mail to the superintendent and a follow up phone call, permission was promptly given. The researcher was put in contact with the elementary school principal who organized a visit to the school. Recognizing that a roundtrip visit to the Ponderosa school district takes more than five hours, many e-mails were sent describing the need to see the school
committee meeting notes and the acceptance of the invitation to visit the building. However, when the researcher arrived at the superintendent’s office, the records were not available. School committee notes from 2009-2013 were available on the district’s website. All other years are kept in “the vault”. Staff was not available at that time to retrieve the records and the researcher was not allowed access to the vault. Other valuable resources such as Annual School Reports of the School Committee and newspaper articles were available at the Ponderosa Historical Society and the Ponderosa Town Hall. These resources aided in providing a comprehensive understanding of the history of kindergarten on Ponderosa.

**Data Collection**

The researcher obtained approval and permission from three school districts in southeastern Massachusetts to collect documentation. The East Haven Public School district is located in a large, urban, industrial city with 40.23 square miles. The Grayling Public School district is located in a smaller, coastal, suburban community with 54.4 square miles. The third district, Ponderosa Public School district is located in a small rural island town of 105.3 square miles. All three districts are located in southeastern Massachusetts.

Data was collected slightly differently for each district based upon access and availability of resources. Districts differed in what records are kept and for how long. The locating of as much relevant sources of historical information as possible was accomplished by examining primary sources (official documents), secondary sources (newspaper articles) and relics (written memos). Historical artifacts researched included school committee meeting notes, annual school reports, internal memorandums, district pamphlets, school policy manuals, personal correspondence with school staff, budget directives/plans, strategic planning initiatives, report
cards, student handbooks, school calendars, district newsletters, a progress report for the Massachusetts Legislature on implementation of full-day kindergarten programs in Massachusetts, newspaper articles and Gallup Polls of the Public’s Attitudes Toward Education. This study relayed on a variety of primary sources. While there is a preference for primary sources, secondary sources were also used due to their availability.

Despite these resources, data collection was challenging. Districts reported having previously had records/resources but disposing of them after a number of years (R. Tollman, personal communication, February 11, 2013). The Boston Public Library had reports, books and autobiographies listed but many were either unavailable or at offsite storage facilities. Paula Willis, research analyst for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, (personal communication, March 25, 2013) reported the DESE only maintains records for several years before getting rid of them. While data was available about current kindergarten experiences, finding information about the history of the kindergarten experience was more difficult. The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care has records from 2009 to 2013 but does not keep records for previous years. Figure 3.1 illustrates an overview of the process of data collection.
Figure 3.1 Process of Data Collection

Figure 3.1 demonstrates gaining permission is the first step. The rest of the process, excluding analyzed data, was interactive. Collected data from an annual school report might lead the researcher to seek out a DESE policy statement or a corresponding newspaper article. After coding or organizing data, the researcher might seek further collaboration from new records.

The primary question was addressed by looking at historical and current resources including the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, district kindergarten standards, textbooks and relics. Three Massachusetts school districts were studied in depth. The districts vary in size, demographics and finances. Similarities and differences will be noted concerning educational philosophies, current and historical kindergarten experiences and curriculum.
The secondary question was addressed by studying political and social attitudes through legislation, funding, editorials, transcripts of oral interviews, newspaper articles, public school records, parent and kindergarten teacher attitudes and beliefs.

The context of the evolution of the kindergarten experience was framed by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Creswell (2009) clearly states qualitative research utilizes research questions not a hypothesis. Other authors of qualitative historical research do not include information about including a hypothesis (Burke, 1997; Brundage, 2008; Danto, 2008; Lagemann, 2000). McCulloch and Richardson (2000) discuss the potential problem of educational researchers using historical sources to scientifically test a hypothesis. However, Howell and Prevenier (2001) propose that current history writing’s methodology can look very different than traditional historical research. Previously historical writers’ goal was to achieve objectivity and to simply present the facts. Howell and Prevenier (2011) state historians now generally agree that objectivity is not possible due to researcher bias. Figure 3.3 Process of Data Collection illustrates the framework utilized in this research study. Throughout the data collection, this researcher recognized a growing belief that tentatively explained relationships between historical factors. In an effort to be transparent and in recognition of other authors who promote the use of a hypothesis in a qualitative historical research study (Busha & Harter, 1980; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), this researcher chose to include a hypothesis.
A hypothesis that was formed shows possible causality which explains relationships between historical factors. The hypothesis is that educational changes in kindergarten were the result of political and social pressures more so than educational research or best practices. All sources were verified for authenticity and veracity of information and organized according to themes that emerged. The most pertinent collected evidence was selected, organized and analyzed. Conclusions were drawn and written in a meaningful narrative.

**Data Analysis**

Documents about three Massachusetts public schools were analyzed. Butin (2010) describes document analysis as a powerful but frequently underused research strategy. Text are public documents which represent and give information about organizations. Coding of documents occurred with emerging themes. Since the same event is portrayed and written about from different perspectives, contrasting certain selected variables allows historical events to be reconstructed with accuracy, similarities and opposing viewpoints (Danto, 2008). A compare and contrast study can support assumptions and dispute rival interpretations.

The primary question was addressed by looking at historical and current resources including the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, district kindergarten standards, textbooks and relics. Three Massachusetts school districts were studied in depth. The districts vary in size, demographics and finances. Similarities and differences will be noted concerning educational philosophies, current and historical kindergarten experiences and curriculum.

The secondary question was addressed by studying political and social attitudes through legislation, funding, editorials, transcripts of oral interviews, newspaper articles, public school records, parent and kindergarten teacher attitudes and beliefs.
A hypothesis that was formed shows possible causality which explains relationships between historical factors. The hypothesis is that educational changes in kindergarten were the result of political and social pressures more so than educational research or best practices.

Emerging themes found in the resources were the following: milestones (kindergarten first began or full day kindergarten started), discussions or policy about entrance age of kindergarten students, attitudes and beliefs about kindergarten (philosophy), finances or budgeting related to kindergarten, overcrowding or redistricting involving kindergarten, social and political pressures about kindergarten and differences between kindergarten and other grades. Resources were color coded to reflect their specific theme. Frequently two or more themes were evoked in a discussion or position taken. In that case, all applicable colors were coded.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

Historical research is subject to the allegation of researcher bias, history (other events) and maturation. There is no way to control for these threats (Frankel & Wallen, 2009). Sources are also scrutinized for external and internal criticism. External criticism refers to the genuineness of a document. Is it falsified; who wrote it; for what purpose, when, where, under what conditions and for what purpose was it written; are there different versions (Frankel & Wallen, 2009)? Once a document is determined to be genuine, the internal criticism is to determine the accuracy of the contents. Is the information accurate, truthful, is the information unlikely, reasonable (Frankel and Wallen, 2009)? All sources were verified for authenticity and veracity of information and organized according to themes which emerged. While historians may hope to show a causal relationship between events described, they must not accept sources’
explanations without investigation. In the end, historians should propose their own explanations of causality (Howell & Prevenier, 2001).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This study had minimum involvement with any human subjects. The primary question was addressed by looking at historical and current resources including the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, district kindergarten standards, textbooks and relics. Three Massachusetts school districts were studied in depth. The districts vary in size, demographics and finances. Similarities and differences will be noted concerning educational philosophies, current and historical kindergarten experiences and curriculum.

The secondary question was addressed by studying political and social attitudes through legislation, funding, editorials, transcripts of oral interviews, newspaper articles, public school records, parent and kindergarten teacher attitudes and beliefs.

Data was not collected via interviews. The data collected was from public records. Due to the minimal exposure to human subjects, it was determined approval was not required from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board. School district participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw permission or access at any time.

**Limitations of the Study**

In historical research, it is imperative to adopt a critical attitude toward any reviewed sources (Frankel & Wallen, 2009). Care must be taken to determine the genuineness and accuracy of historical sources. External criticism refers to the genuineness of a source. Was the document really written by the stated author? Internal criticism relates to the accuracy of the
information in the document. Is the information true? Busha and Harter (1980) caution researchers need to consider biases of information, realize there are many factors that can contribute to historical episodes and remember that evidence should not be examined from only one point of view. Historical research is unable to control for threats of internal validity.

Personal biases of the researcher need to be acknowledged. This researcher has always valued education as extremely important and an avenue to better one’s self. However, this researcher did not attend kindergarten. Despite not attending kindergarten, the researcher was successful as a student and a professional. As an assistant principal at an elementary school, a significant job responsibility is focused on struggling students. As our district’s academic demands have increased, so have the number of students requiring additional instructional support or special education services. When attempting to determine the cause of a lack of effective progress, staff are asked to consider whether the problem might be curriculum related. A reoccurring concern is whether students struggle because of learning disabilities or because of a “curriculum disability”. Staff worry that we are abandoning developmentally appropriate practices for drill and repetition of skills students may not be ready for. The majority of the researcher’s educational career was spent as a school counselor. It was unusual to service a child for anxiety issues years ago. As academic demands escalated, more students and parents have presented with anxiety. Test and school performance are often identified as a source of their anxiety.

Another possible personal bias of the researcher is being employed by one of the districts. The researcher has acknowledged being more familiar with one of the participating districts, Grayling Public School district, and made every effort to view resources from all three districts objectively.
Chapter Four: Report of Research Findings

Report of Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to examine the kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective. Cuban (1992) reported most early education teachers were taught that developmentally appropriate practices for kindergarten were to promote learning through play and socialization. Previously, kindergarten had been allowed to function as a unique learning environment which was different than the elementary grades (Cuban, 1992). Its curriculum was based on child development knowledge (Goffin, 1989), focused on the importance of a partnership with parents and families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and emphasized the whole child using play and toy materials in a nonacademic climate (Cuban, 1992). However attitudes from parents, first grade teachers and political legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and it’s call for accountability and high stakes testing have resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007). Kindergarten is no longer expected to act as a bridge between early educational experiences and the rigors of “real school” (Graue, 2001; Hatch, 2002). Graue (2009) states we now expect kindergartners to learn to read rather than learning to tie their shoes. Booher-Jennings (2005) states kindergarten must now meet its long-standing goals of supporting children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development along with starting the process of preparing children for success on the high-stakes standardized tests they will begin taking in third grade. This study researched the historical literature of three school districts in Southeastern Massachusetts to determine what the kindergarten experience was like and what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. The intent was to frame the study by exploring major turning points such as the first kindergarten in the United
States (1837), the first public kindergarten in the United States (1873), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), A Nation at Risk report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001).

Chapter three detailed the overview of the methodology that was used for this study and the rationale for choosing a qualitative historical research method. Chapter four includes a more detailed narrative of the research method along with the research findings. This chapter is organized by the following sections: 1) research questions and background, 2) data collection, 3) findings and 4) summary.

Research Questions and Background

**Primary:** How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?

**Secondary:** How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?

A hypothesis that was formed shows possible causality which explains relationships between historical factors. The hypothesis is that educational changes in kindergarten were the result of political and social pressures more so than educational research or best practices.

Attitudes and beliefs regarding the purposes, goals and curriculum for kindergarten instruction have changed over time. In order to document these changes, the primary research question allowed the researcher to explore the attitudes and beliefs toward the kindergarten experience at different periods of time beginning with the mid 1800’s leading up to today.
The secondary question addressed how political and social influences have impacted attitudes and beliefs about kindergarten which in turn transformed the experience and impacted the kindergarten curriculum. Advocates say current early education policies are based on unproven methods rather than research based practices and are fueled by political pressures rather than educational knowledge (National School Boards Association, 2006). It is important for educators to understand from a historical perspective how kindergarten instruction was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of society at various time periods. How do five year olds learn best? This question was explored based on the attitudes and norms present in various points of history. Learning more about the history, changes and purposes of kindergarten including political and social pressures for curriculum changes illustrated how and why the kindergarten experience has changed.

**Data Collection**

Historical research was chosen as the most appropriate lens to view the kindergarten experience over time. It’s valuable for educators to understand how kindergarten instruction and experiences were influenced over history by the attitudes and beliefs of society. Understanding curriculum changes through a detailed analysis of historical data and attitudes and beliefs can offer insight into organizational culture, current trends and future possibilities (“The Historical Approach”, n.d.). Some purposes for historical research include: to predict; to determine if former solutions might be applicable to present day problems; to test relational hypotheses; to make people aware of what has happened in the past to learn from failures and successes and to more fully understand current educational practices (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Historians must not accept sources reasons as valid without scrutiny. While historians may wish to determine a
causal relationship between researched events, they should propose their own description of what may have been the causal relationship (Howell & Prevenier, 2001).

Six essential steps for conducting this historical research were:

1. Identify a need for historical knowledge or recognize a historical problem.

2. Locate as much relevant sources of historical information as possible.

3. If appropriate, form a hypothesis that tentatively explains relationships between historical factors.

4. Rigorously collect and organize evidence after verifying the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.

5. Select, organize and analyze the most pertinent collected evidence and the draw conclusions, and

6. Record conclusions in a meaningful narrative (Busha & Harter, 1980).

The kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience have been identified as an educational problem warranting a historical lens. The previously listed steps will guide this historical research.

This research study examined three southeastern Massachusetts public school districts. The sampling strategy of choosing districts was to provide maximum variation and ability to gain access to the research sites. The East Haven Public School district is located in a large, urban, industrial city with 40.23 square miles. The Grayling Public School district is located in a
smaller, coastal, suburban community with 54.4 square miles. The third district, Ponderosa Public School district is located in a small rural island town of 105.3 square miles.

Findings

The earliest kindergarten experiences in the three communities varied. Table 4.1 illustrates the milestones of when the districts started half day kindergartens, added full day kindergartens and implemented all full day kindergartens.

Table 4.1 Public School District Implementation of Kindergarten Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>East Haven</th>
<th>Grayling</th>
<th>Ponderosa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half day kindergarten classes started</td>
<td>Oct. 17, 1892</td>
<td>Sept. 1953</td>
<td>Sept. 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full day kindergarten classes started</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Sept. 2001</td>
<td>Sept. 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All full day kindergarten classes</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Sept. 2005</td>
<td>Sept. 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years 100% full day kindergarten classes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data from Table 4.1 illustrates the wide range of time between the three districts starting half day kindergarten, starting full day kindergarten classes and implementing all full day kindergarten classes.

**The First Kindergarten Experience in East Haven Public School District**

The East Haven School district opened the Autumn Street Building as a kindergarten school in the fall of 1892. Half day kindergarten classes started for the first time on October 17, 1892 with a principal, Ms. Kate Burton and an assistant Ms. Georgianna Rupert. Both were noted by the Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1892, 1893 (City of East Haven, 1893) to be qualified to teach young children. Interestingly the Annual School Report for the City of East Haven 1890 and 1891 had no mention of kindergarten. The Annual School Report for the City of East Haven 1892 (City of East Haven, 1893) states a kindergarten building opened with a morning and an afternoon session but with no discussion. This report however does discuss the general conditions of the school system. In a communication from the School Committee to the City Council, the School Committee respectfully protested the conditions of the buildings. School buildings were deemed unsuitable and unsafe. Some buildings lacked fire escapes and all were reportedly overcrowded with classes ranging from 50-75 students. Instruction took place in cold hallways and there were reports of serious illnesses. Truancy was described as a great evil. Teachers and students repeatedly petitioned for improved conditions.

The Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1892 (City of East Haven, 1893) presented figures from the 55th Annual Report of the Board of Education. The East Haven school district ranked 312 out of 351 cities and towns on student expenditure. Only 39 school districts ranked lower and East Haven school district was the lowest of the 20 towns and cities in
its county. The East Haven school district ranked lowest in Bristol County and 316 out of 351 cities and towns in the state on percentage of valuation appropriated by town and cities for public schools. The East Haven school district also ranked lowest in the county and 344 out of 351 cities and towns on ratio of attendance at public schools. All of these rankings were lower than the year before. Previously the East Haven school district had ranked 205 on student expenditure, 261 on percentage of valuation appropriated for public schools and 335 on ratio of attendance at public schools out of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts. The Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1892 (City of East Haven, 1893, p. 17) states “The relative standing of East Haven is not a pleasing one to consider. It presents food for thought and cause for humiliation”. While recognizing the embarrassing position the City Council is placed in and the difficulty in finding funding sufficient to meet the demands of their rapidly developing city, the school committee reminded the City Council their seemingly “indifference seriously interferes with the duties and function of said committee (p.17)”.

In the 1891-1892 school year, the East Haven school district had a total school population of 15,680 students (City of East Haven, 1893). Fifty-five percent or 8,692 of those students attended public schools. Twenty-six percent or 3,981 students attended parochial or private schools. The remaining students were either employed (7%) or neither at school or work (12%). The school district had forty-four school buildings with the Hopkinton School not in use. The school committee deemed six school buildings unsuitable for school purposes.

Kindergarten enrollment figures were not listed for 1892. However the Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1893 (City of East Haven, 1894) listed 105 kindergarten students between two half day classes. General school conditions seemed to improve by the next year as the report states “In no previous year in the history of the city has there been such ample
provision made for increasing the school accommodations as during the present one (p.18)”.

The Annual School Report discusses East Haven’s ranking in comparison to other school districts in Massachusetts. The rankings show how East Haven School District compares to the total number of school districts in the state which was 351 districts in 1891 and 1892 and 352 school districts in 1893. Table 4.2 shows the ranking of the East Haven school district according to the 54th, 55th and 56th Annual Report of the Board of Education as reported in the Annual School Report of the City of East Haven of 1892 (City of East Haven, 1893) and 1893 (City of East Haven, 1894).

Table 4.2 Ranking of the East Haven School District in Comparison to Other Districts in Massachusetts by the Board of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1893</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Expenditure</td>
<td>205/351</td>
<td>312/351</td>
<td>254/352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Valuation Appropriated for Public Schools</td>
<td>261/351</td>
<td>316/351</td>
<td>240/352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of Attendance</td>
<td>335/351</td>
<td>344/351</td>
<td>345/352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 illustrates the East Haven school district’s comparative ranking among the cities and towns in Massachusetts. All of the rankings decreased from 1891 to 1892. From 1892 to 1893, student expenditure and percentage of valuation appropriated for public schools improved while the ratio of attendance ranking decreased by one district.

The Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1894 quotes Superintendent Laramee discussing his attitude towards teaching kindergarten students:
Teachers who have caught the spirit of kindergarten, who have learned how
to direct the natural activities of childhood, who have the divine power of leading
and not the harsh spirit that drives, are demanded by the educational spirit of the
times and are coming to the front everywhere in response to this demand. (City of East
Haven, 1895)

Superintendent Joseph F. Clark reported in the Annual Report of the City of East Haven
1895 (City of East Haven, 1896) the opening of a free kindergarten on Overlook Street. The
Kindergarten Association members completely supported the school through contributions.
Superintendent Clark stated this was a valuable adjunct to our preschool programs and that many
non-English speaking families were receiving special preparation in the English language. He
also reported responding to a petition by a large number of citizens requesting a kindergarten in
the eastern section of the city. He commented the city now has two kindergarten schools in the
central part of the city (Autumn and the Free one) and one in the eastern part of the city (Porter).
He acknowledged the petition addressed the need for a kindergarten in other parts of the city. He
expressed the intent to add a kindergarten in the northern section of the city once an acceptable
place is found and in the southern part of the city as soon as possible. Superintendent Clark said:

   By establishing two more kindergarten you will place this excellent means
   of training for young people in all parts of the city. The value of training is
   becoming more generally recognized, especially in cities. The number of
   kindergarten supported at the public expense is rapidly increasing. In our city,
there is abundant opportunity for the kindergarten to do its beneficial work.

(City of East Haven, 1896, p. 20)

The Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1895 (City of East Haven, 1896) noted there was a total enrollment of 202 kindergarten students in the East Haven school district. The Autumn Kindergarten had 107 students in two half day classes and the Porter Street Kindergarten had 95 students in two half day classes. The kindergarten enrollment figures for 1896 were 91 students enrolled in the Autumn Kindergarten with two half day classes and 93 students enrolled in the Porter Street Kindergarten (City of East Haven, 1897).

According to data collected for the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant Program, The East Haven Public School system switched to full day kindergarten in or around 1958. For the fiscal year 2003 which reflected program structure for FY02, the data shows East Haven Public Schools had offered full day kindergarten for forty-four years (Department of Education, 2003).

**The First Kindergarten Experience in Grayling Public School District**

The Grayling School Committee first discussed starting kindergarten at the March 31, 1952 school committee meeting in response to a request from parents to start kindergarten for all five year old students (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, March 31). Their expressed beliefs were that children need a transition between home and regular school. Children usually enjoy kindergarten and can help students to settle down to be ready to work when they enter first grade. Skilled teachers can help children overcome any personality difficulties to prepare them for first grade. The possibility of offering kindergarten through grade three schools through town was discussed at the October 22, 1952 meeting (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, October 22).
The Grayling School Committee and the community had a lengthy discussion about starting kindergarten on November 25, 1952 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, November 25). Superintendent Norton expressed it would be helpful to discuss the matter with interested citizens of the town especially since the committee was preparing the budget for 1953. He commented with “the opening of the new junior-senior high school it will be possible to do more in the elementary schools than just teach ‘reading, writing and sitting’ (p 35)”. When expressing his beliefs about kindergarten, Superintendent Norton said:

…five years six months was somewhat young for children to enter the first grade as they are often not ready to read at that time. A child should not be encouraged to read until he has developed to the point where his eyes can focus on the printed page. Nevertheless, there are good arguments for sending a child to kindergarten early. He builds up a background for education; he learns new words, he learns to act in groups and how to get along with other children. A good age for entering kindergarten would be age five and for entering the first grade, age six. It would then be possible to set up a readiness for learning and each child could then progress according to his needs. With a kindergarten, he would have a sense of security and achievement and at the same time he would extend his basic interests. Kindergarten should be open to all and a room would be provided in each of the elementary
schools. There would be two sessions of a half day each so that the transportation problem is the most difficult to solve. (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, November 25, p. 35)

Superintendent Norton continued to discuss the cost involved with the required additional transportation, equipment and teachers. A community member, Mr. Christopher Apt, asked if kindergarten was the same thing as the current sub-primary. The response was no, it provided quite different training and was available to all. While children learn to work together, the focus is not on reading. Often until the first grade teacher has taught reading, the work of first grade is delayed. Further discussion centered around hiring specially trained kindergarten teachers rather than using first grade teachers, the grade configurations of buildings offering kindergarten and the entrance age for kindergarten. One community member favored narrowing down the age spread and another voiced support for lowering the required entrance age to four years, six months. Superintendent Norton replied that students that young cannot focus on a flat plane. No matter how much coaching, a child that young is not ready for reading. It’s better to wait until such time they are close to reading than to discourage them to trying too soon. When asked if kindergarten would be compulsory, the committee replied state law does not require mandatory enrollment until the age of seven. Just as with first grade, attendance is not mandated. In fact, Superintendent Norton felt the more likely problem would be to keep children who are too young out of school. After a show of hands showing support, the school committee voted to implement half day kindergarten in the fall of 1953 (a morning and an afternoon session) and gave general approval to establish a thirty to one ratio of students to teachers. At that time, the state average ratio was twenty-seven to one.
On January 6, 1953, the school committee discussed school entrance ages and then voted children need to be five years old on or before September 15 in order to enter kindergarten and be six years old on or before September 15 to enter first grade (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, January 6). The committee agreed with the recommendations from a Harvard Field Studies Survey. Half day kindergarten started in September of 1953 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, August 11). Over the next ten years, parents requested and were denied early entrance to kindergarten for their children both to kindergarten and first grade (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, September 8; 1958, August 19). The school committee consistently voted no exceptions be made to the established age limits. On September 8, 1953, three exemptions were requested to go to first grade since the students had already done kindergarten (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, September 8). The school committee voted no. Later during the meeting, the school committee answered a phone call from a community member. Mrs. Driscoll asked the committee to reconsider the vote on granting a exemptions to the entrance age of first grade. If they didn’t reconsider and grant the exemptions, she intended to write to the newspapers and the State Department of Education and reminded the committee her family were among the larger taxpayers. The committee did not reverse its decision. The subject of kindergarten entrance age was reviewed on June 11, 1960, October 30, 1962, March 19, 1963 and June 6, 1963 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1960, June 11; 1962, October 30; 1963, March 19; 1963, June 6). On October 30, 1962, the school committee asked teachers for their opinions on lowering the entrance age to kindergarten. Again, the consensus was it should not be lowered (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1962, October 30).
At the June 6, 1963 meeting, the Grayling School Committee discussed school admission and promotion polices to become effective in September of 1963. The Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes (1963, June 6) state the committee thinks of the schools as having five major levels: kindergarten for 5-6 year olds, primary for 6-9 year olds, middle level for 9-11 year olds, intermediate level for 11-14 year olds and high school for 14-19 year olds. At each level, the teaching practices are appropriate to the maturity of the students to provide for learning at their own pace. Students including kindergarten may be eligible to accelerate to a higher grade if it’s in the best interest of the child. Kindergarten students should be given the opportunity to accelerate if during the first month of school they were found to rank high among first graders. This would be based upon recommendations from the teacher and principal, and tests and criteria rating maturity and ability to excel. Further discussion stated there is no correct entrance age for kindergarten children. Committee members felt despite repeated parent request for exemptions, the reasons for the established entrance ages have not changed. Most children likely benefit from waiting to enter kindergarten. The delay in the entrance age were viewed as improving student accommodations and reducing the incident of retardation.

When attempting to first hire teachers for the impending start of kindergarten, the Grayling Public School system ran into difficulties. On March 13, April 28, May 2 and May 12, 1953, the Grayling School Committee discussed the shortage of qualified kindergarten teachers (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, March 13; 1953, April 28; 1953, May 2; 1953, May 12). Administrators were given permission by the school committee to hire highly recommended kindergarten teachers outside of the typical hiring practices. Permission was granted to offer three kindergarten teachers contracts before one had been interviewed and before the other two had been met. On May 12, 1953, Superintendent Norton told the School
Committee he was “finding very few teachers to the gallon of gasoline” (p. 59). He described one interested candidate who had recently taught a kindergarten class of 70 students with one assistant. The program was being closed due to the crowded conditions. Due to the acute teacher shortage and the fact that better candidates may quickly accept positions elsewhere, the school committee authorized Mr. Norton “to take whatever steps may be necessary to obtain the best staff possible under existing conditions” (p. 59). The Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes in May show one starting kindergarten teacher being offered a yearly salary of $3050 while another starting elementary teacher was offered a yearly salary of $2600.

In the fall of 1953, kindergarten morning sessions opened at 8:40 a.m. and closed at 11:20 a.m. The afternoon sessions were from 12:30 to 2:30 while the school day for grades one through five were from 8:50 to 2:10 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, August 11). All of the elementary schools had morning kindergarten classes and the Cottage School also had an afternoon class. Kindergarten students at the Cottage School who required transportation were assigned to the morning classes. Kindergarten students who walked to school were assigned to the afternoon classes. Students would switch sessions after the first Monday in February. School started for junior high and high school students on September 9. In June of 1953, the Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes (1953, June 5) reported 168 students had registered for kindergarten to start in the fall. Elementary students started school on September 14 except for kindergarten and first grade students who started with half day orientation sessions on September 11, 1953 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, June 5).

During the 1953 – 1954 school year, weekly meetings were held with kindergarten teachers to develop the aims of the kindergarten program. Kindergarten students received
different district wide report cards than other elementary students (Grayling School Committee Notes, 1953, November 6; 1954, March 21).

Concerns about overcrowding or space issues for kindergarten were discussed in 1954, 1961, 1962 at two school committee meetings in 1955, and at three meetings in 1960 (Grayling School Committee Notes, 1954, July 13; 1955, April 12; 1955, October 11; 1960, June 11; 1960, September 7; 1960 September 13; 1961, February 14; 1962, October 9). During those years, overcrowding or space issues were considered to be an overall elementary concern on three occasions, specific to kindergarten on four occasions and due to the necessity of closing a school for repairs on one occasion. While several plans of moving students were proposed, the most common proposal and agreed upon solution was to move kindergarten students. Kindergarten classes were moved in 1954, 1955, and in 1961 from the Port Storm School to St. Benjamin Parish (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1954, July 13; 1955, October 11; 1961, February 14). On October 9, 1962, the school committee allocated the number of rooms to be used by each grade in each building for the 1963 – 1964 school year. Topper School was allotted three rooms for kindergarten with an average class size of 25 students per morning and afternoon classes. Upper Westside School was allotted two rooms for 90+ kindergarten students (average class size of 22 – 23+). Deaconess and Port Storm Schools were each allotted one room for kindergarten. Deaconess had 50+ students enrolled (average class size 25+) and Port Storm had 20+ students for one session of kindergarten (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1962, October 9).
Table 4.3  Kindergarten Enrollment and Class Size in Grayling Public School District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1955</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1962</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Enrollment in District</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>2,824*</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Students enrolled</td>
<td>168*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>254*</td>
<td>312*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes anticipated or enrolled students, actual figures may vary

The First Kindergarten Experience in Ponderosa Public School District

The first discussion about kindergarten of a public kindergarten in the school district of Ponderosa occurred during a school committee meeting in 1889 (A Generous Gift, 1890). While the committee supported starting kindergarten on the island, no action was taken. However when Mrs. E. Smith Winston of Boston, visited the island, she proposed and offered to defray the cost of a kindergarten teacher. The committee accepted and Mrs. Rose Hubbert was hired to teach one afternoon a week in the primary departments. When the state board of education visited over the summer, they strongly suggested a different type of desk. Mrs. Winston generously donated desks, seats, a table and chairs adapted for the kindergarten work. Mrs. Winston has an affinity for the Summer Street School as that’s where Mr. Winston attended school. The local newspaper (Kindergarten in the Schools, 1890) called for the town to supplement Mrs. Winston’s generosity by providing desks to the other schools.

The Annual Report of the School Committee to the Town of Ponderosa for the year ending December 31, 1964 (Town of Ponderosa, 1964) states the educational highlight of the year was to establish a public kindergarten. Half day kindergarten started in the school district
of Ponderosa in the fall of 1964. Former Superintendent Peterson and the students at the Vocational School were credited for converting an unused first floor storeroom into a band room where kindergarten is now located. Mrs. Paula Osborn taught both morning and afternoon classes to a combined enrollment of 56 students. Entrance age was not identified for incoming kindergarten students. However students entering first grade in the fall had to have reached the age of five years, nine months, on or before October 1. Students entering first grade were required to provide a birth certificate and a record of vaccination or a certificate from the school nurse after an appropriate examination. In the case of school cancellation, the fire alarm system will ring 2-2-2 at 6:45 a.m. and 11:45 a.m. This affects grades kindergarten through twelfth grade.

**Framing around Major Educational Turning Points**

The first major turning point in relation to kindergarten was the opening of the first kindergarten in Germany. The first kindergarten or “child’s garden” was started in 1837 by Friedrich Froebel. Froebel promoted kindergarten as a nurturing environment where children could develop their social, mental and emotional facilities through play, music and movement before starting the formal academic rigors of the academic system (Lee, et al., 2006). Students between the ages of 2 to 6 years of age were prepared by using manipulatives, finger play, dance, songs, paper crafts and games and highlighting a reverence for nature (Fromberg, 2006). This initial model for kindergarten promoted young children learning through a variety of physical manipulations and play (William, 1992). Froebel viewed kindergarten as a protected place to develop the multiple dimensions of children before they entered the formal educational system (Lee, et al., 2006). His philosophy that young children think and learn differently than older children and adults was a cornerstone of early childhood education (Chung and Walsh, 2000).
Froebel stated children “need sensory experiences, develop from opportunities to study the world around them, are capable of making choices, and can benefit from playful activities” (Fromberg, 2006, p. 68).

In 1873, the first English speaking public kindergarten opened in the United States in St. Louis. The goals and purposes quickly changed to the public school’s goals of inculcating cultural values and norms from Froebel’s metaphysical goals (Lee et al., 2006). Despite this change in purposes, Froebel’s philosophy of educating the whole child and the importance of self directed play largely remained popular until the 1970’s (Lee et al., 2006). Meisels and Shonkoff (2000) stated education was viewed as a process of development rather than of instruction. At that time, early formal academic instruction was viewed as detrimental to young children’s development. Private kindergartens were the norm with public schools charging a fee for attending kindergarten. Publicly funded kindergartens were introduced in the middle of the 20th century (Fromberg, 2006).

The first recorded school conversation about opening a public kindergarten in the three participating districts was in 1889. Ponderosa discussed the desirability of adding kindergarten methods during a school committee meeting in 1889 (A Generous Gift, 1890). While the committee supported starting kindergarten on the island, no action was taken. However when Mrs. E. Smith Winston of Boston, visited the island, she proposed and offered to defray the cost of a kindergarten teacher. The committee accepted and Mrs. Rose Hubbert was hired to teach one afternoon a week in the primary departments. The kindergarten was privately supported rather than publicly supported (A Generous Gift, 1890; Town of Ponderosa, 1964).
The East Haven School district opened the Autumn Street Building as a kindergarten school in the fall of 1892. Half day kindergarten classes started for the first time on October 17, 1892 with a principal, Ms. Kate Burton and an assistant Ms. Georgianna Rupert. Both were noted by the Annual School Report of the City of East Haven 1892, 1893 (City of East Haven, 1893) to be qualified to teach young children. Interestingly the Annual School Report for the City of East Haven 1890 and 1891 had no mention of kindergarten.

The Grayling School Committee first discussed starting kindergarten in response to a request from parents to start kindergarten for all students by five years old on March 31, 1952 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, March 31). Their expressed beliefs were that children need a transition between home and regular school. Children usually enjoy kindergarten and can help students to settle down to be ready to work when they enter first grade. Skilled teachers can help children overcome any personality difficulties to prepare them for first grade. The possibility of offering kindergarten through grade three schools through town was discussed at the October 22, 1952 meeting (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, October 22). None of the resources referred to the first kindergarten opened in 1837 or the first public kindergarten in the United States in 1873.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 through 1982

Another major turning point in the history of kindergarten was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965 to offer equitable educational opportunities to the nation’s disadvantaged. This legislation provided federal financial support for educationally vulnerable school children (Thomas & Brady, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 1965). The modern educational reform
movement has been traced to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Historically, the federal government had left educational matters to state and local decision makers. Now federal dollars would have a role in public schooling policies (Duffy, et al., 2008). Available resources for the East Haven Public School system and the Ponderosa Public School system from 1965 through 1983 make no mention of this piece of legislation in general or kindergarten specifically.

Resources for the Grayling Public School district do not mention the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes on April 8, 1965 discuss the Federal Project Head Start under the Anti Poverty Act for preschool opportunities. During the next five years, kindergarten issues were a frequent topic of discussion at school committee meetings. There were multiple references to kindergarten being overcrowded (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1965, May 11; 1965, August 10; 1965, September 14; 1965, November 10; 1965, November 30; 1966, August 10; 1966, November 15; 1967, September 12; 1967, November 9; 1970, October 20). Upper Westside Elementary School staff spoke about using whatever spaces were available in the building to house 127 kindergarten students including the gymnasium, the cafeteria, the library and the janitor’s closet (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1965, November 30). The Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes showed multiple proposed solutions – move kindergarten children from one building to another (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1965, August 10; 1965, September 14; 1966, August 10; 1966, November 15; 1967, November 9); hire additional kindergarten teachers or aides (1965, September 14; 1965, November 10; 1970, October 20); continue to use non-school buildings for kindergarten such as churches and town recreation buildings (1965, August 10; 1965, September 14; 1966, August 10; 1967, November
9. Ultimately kindergarten and fourth grade students were moved, teachers and aides were hired and churches and the town’s recreational center were used to house kindergarten classes until 1967. The Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes (1967, November 9) on November 9, 1967 state that schools are no longer allowed to use buildings not owned by taxpayers. The opening of the new Deaconess Elementary School in September will make it possible to house all kindergarten students in school buildings. The Grayling Education Association’ union contract for the school year 1970 – 1971 states the school committee will strive to achieve a maximum number of 25 students per kindergarten class (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1970, October 20).

In September of 1966, the Grayling School Committee discussed correspondence from the Department of Education stating it is now mandatory for districts to have school for at least one hundred eighty days with twenty-five hours per week for elementary schools and twenty-seven and a half hours for secondary school. It was stated that kindergarten classes were not included in this new requirement. Later in the meeting, it was stated that kindergarten is included (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1966, September 13). A memo from the Department of Education later reconfirmed kindergarten classes are required to be provided for a minimum of one hundred and eighty days (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, September 3).

On September 12, 1967, concern was expressed by Superintendent Norton concerning the recent state legislation mandating school districts to offer half day kindergartens by 1972 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1967, September 12). The law requires school districts to offer kindergarten but attendance is not mandatory. At that time, most towns did not have public kindergartens. The entering age under the new legislation may be four months lower
than Grayling Public Schools current entrance age. If the school district changed the entrance age to match the legislation’s entrance age, it could add one hundred and thirty students to one class. This oversized class would present problems as it progressed through twelve years of school. The proposal was to consider dropping the kindergarten entrance age by one month for the next four years to avoid a large bulge in the kindergarten class size of 1972. The Grayling School Committee (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, April 27) also voted to conform to a Department of Education directive to lower the entrance age of first grade to six years old by December 31 of the year entering first grade. A decision was made that students who had not attended kindergarten yet but were now eligible to attend first grade, be encouraged to enroll in kindergarten instead of first grade.

In 1971, school committee member Mrs. Harrington noted current public attitudes toward schools. She stated teachers need to be aware that they serve the public and the public has an ever increasing demand for accountability. Kindergarten continued with a different report card (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, April 27). It was given to parents twice a year rather than three times a year for older students. Its purpose was to summarize a student’s learning as seen in physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth.

Overcrowding and class size issues continued to be discussed for kindergarten students (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1972, May 9; 1973, November 13; 1973, November 19; 1973, November 20; 1974, May 30; 1975, September 9; 1977, February 8; 1978, March 28). When analyzing classroom facilities due to overcrowding, the belief was that kindergarten classes should be larger than regular classrooms (about 700 – 900 sq. ft.). Kindergarten classes were considered specially designed. Classrooms should have enough space to allow for small group work, individual conferences, centers and allow free movement without
congestion (Grayling School Committee Notes, 1974, May 30). Five rooms which meet the expectation of a kindergarten room currently exist. This year there were eight rooms used as kindergarten rooms. It is projected that there will be a need for ten kindergarten rooms in the 1974 – 1975 school year and twelve needed in the 1977 – 1978 school year (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1974, May 30).

Standardized testing was discussed by the Grayling School Committee for the first time in 1974 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1974, October 8). The national percentiles were reported for reading, math and battery in K-8. The Stanford test was deemed out of date therefore the district switched to the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). Standardized testing was again discussed on October 28, 1975 and on January 5, 1978. Both times caution was expressed to remember standardized testing is just one source of information about students. Other sources of information include attendance, homework completion, participation and teacher observation (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1975, October 28; 1978, January 5).

**Attitudes and Beliefs about Teaching and Learning**

The Fourth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes toward Education (Gallup, 1972) conducted a national attitude survey to measure and record the attitude of American citizens toward public school systems. The Gallup education surveys were considered a major source of information concerning trends of opinion on school issues. The annual study covers some new areas as they become salient and repeats some questions from previous years to measure trends. The findings of the study reflect attitudes across the nation in general. One thousand six hundred and fourteen adults participated in the study for every area of the country and in all types of
communities. A separate survey of two hundred and seventy educators was also administered to learn the views of professional educators. While elementary schools were referred to as grades 1 – 6, one question asked about the starting age for school. Table 4.4 shows the responses to the question: Some educators have proposed that young children start school a year earlier at the age of four. Does this sound like a good idea or not?

Table 4.4 Proposal to Change the Starting Age for School to Four Years Old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>Parents of Public School Children %</th>
<th>Parents of Private School Children %</th>
<th>Professional Educators %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Favor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 showed the majority of respondents in all categories did not favor lowering the starting age for school.

None of the twenty-one questions in the Gallup Poll (Gallup, 1972) specifically asked about kindergarten. Most of the questions were general questions about the public’s attitudes towards public schools. Specific grades were only mentioned in three of the questions. Elementary schools were mentioned twice and were referred to as grades 1–6. Junior and senior high school was stated in one question as grades 7–12 and another question mentioned fifth grade English and seventh grade math when giving an example of nongraded schools. However, the Gallup education surveys were considered a major source of information concerning trends
of opinion on school issues. Parents and the community in general are stakeholders in public education who participate in the decision making of school curriculum and financing which impacts grades preschool through twelve. Therefore the public’s attitude about public schools has the potential to influence curriculum and funding including in kindergarten. The following survey questions measure and record the attitude of American citizens in general in 1972 toward public school systems. Participants were asked the open question: “What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?” Table 4.5 shows how the general population and how professional educators listed the problems in public schools.

**Table 4.5 Major Problems Confronting Public Schools in 1972**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>No Children in Schools %</th>
<th>Public School Parents %</th>
<th>Private School Parents %</th>
<th>Professional Educators %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration/segregation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s lack of interest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large school/classes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dope, drugs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no problems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 illustrates that all subgroups except for professional educators believe the number one problem of public schools is a lack of discipline. Professional educators believe the number one problem is finances. Attitudes and beliefs of the general public can impact funding intended to address perceived problems in school.

The Gallup Poll believed most citizens complain about schools rather than to stop and think about the positive things in schools. In an effort to uncover what a typical citizen thinks his schools are doing well, Table 4.6 asked the question “In your own opinion, in what ways are your local public schools particularly good?”

Table 4.6  What’s Right with your Local Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>No Children in School %</th>
<th>Public School Parents %</th>
<th>Private School Parents %</th>
<th>Professional Educators %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to Date Teaching Method</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Curricular Activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Racial Conflicts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small School/Classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.6 illustrates nationally the general population rated the curriculum (21%) and the teachers (19%) as what’s right with their local public schools. The study noted that responses were almost never stated in terms of results or achievement such as reaching specific educational goals or by the success of the graduates.

School curriculum and instruction are typically a reflection of the goals of the school system. When the goals of school change, curriculum and instruction change also. The support for kindergarten and what the kindergarten experience looks like changes based upon educational goals. In an effort to discover the public’s view on what the goal of education should be, the survey made an attempt to give an open response question with two probes. The purpose was to distinguish between the ends and the means. To uncover the public’s ideas on the ultimate goal of education, participants were asked “People have different reasons why they want their children to get an education. What are the chief reasons that come to your mind?” The most frequent responses were to get better jobs (44%), to get along better with people in society (43%) and to make more money/achieve financial success (38%). Other responses included to attain self-satisfaction (21%), to stimulate their minds (15%) and miscellaneous reasons (11%). The survey interprets these results to mean Americans are practical and view education as the way to achieve success in life.

The second prong of the question was asked about elementary students and about junior high and high school students. Interviewers handed each participant a card with nine specific programs listed on it. They were then asked “Which three of these educational programs (card list) would you like your local elementary schools (grades 1-6) to give more attention to? They were then asked the same question about the junior and high school students. Participant’s top three choices for the elementary grades were to pay more attention to: 1) teaching students the
skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, 2) teaching students how to solve problems and think for themselves and 3) teaching students to respect law and authority. The three least frequent responses were: 7) teaching students health and physical education, 8) teaching students about the world of today and yesterday (that is, history, geography, and civics) and 9) teaching students to compete with others. Participant’s top three choices for the junior and high school grades were to pay more attention to: 1) teaching students to respect law and authority, 2) teaching students how to solve problems and think for themselves and 3) teaching students vocational skills. The least three frequent responses were: 7) teaching the students the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, 8) teaching students health and physical education and 9) teaching students how to compete with others.

A guiding principal about kindergarten students is “young children construct values and knowledge through relationships and interactions with dependable adults in their lives” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2008, p.3). Learning is maximized when the child, parents and teachers work together. Home and school need to work collaboratively to benefit children’s academic and personal growth. If a student is not doing well in school, knowing where the weak link is helps to determine a solution to the problem. The survey also ask the public who or what is chiefly to blame when a student does poorly in school. This question attempted to discover where the typical citizen places the blame for school failure. Participants were asked “When some children do poorly in school, some people place the blame on the children, some on the children’s home life, some on the school, and some on the teachers. Of course, all these things share the blame, but where would you place the chief blame?” Table 4.7 illustrates the responses to that question.
Table 4.7 Where the Chief Blame Lies when Students do Poorly in School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>Parents of School Children %</th>
<th>Professional Educators %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the Children</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Children’s Home Life</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from Table 4.7 show the consensus is the child’s home life is to blame. The survey questioned why with such wide agreement that home factors have a significant impact on school failure, isn’t more time and effort devoted to finding ways to deal with these home factors. Other surveys have shown both poorly educated and highly educated parents are eager for help and suggestions (Gallup, 1972).

The Gallup Poll (Gallup, 1972) has previously demonstrated the public’s high regard for the teaching profession. In the current survey, 67% of respondents reported they would like a child of theirs to take up teaching as a career. However, in earlier surveys, the percentage was higher. Comments made by respondents which may shed light on the decreased percentage included: teaching jobs are scarce and “that teaching has become ‘dangerous,’ with children permitted to run ‘wild’ in many schools” (p. 40).
A Nation at Risk Report 1983 through 2000

A Nation at Risk report was a report written in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education summarizing research papers and public hearings to investigate the quality of education in the United States. It proclaimed the K-12 educational achievement was declining and imperiling our technological and economic status (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). None of the available resources for the three school districts specifically mentioned the Nation at Risk Report in the years following the publication of this report. The available resources for the East Haven Public School system didn’t offer information on kindergarten during that time.

The Grayling School Committee continued to address overcrowding and staffing issues in kindergarten (Grayling School Committee Meeting notes, 1983, September 27; 1985, February 12; 1990, September 12; 1990, September 25; 1992, January 28). On January 24, 1995, the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Committee recommended changing the kindergarten entrance age from being five years old on or before 12/31 to on or before 9/1 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1995, January 24). It was proposed the change would help with inequalities within kindergarten and early childhood programs. The towns of Grayling and Bourne were the only Cape Cod communities who had not adopted the 9/1 entrance age. School committee members questioned how a change in the entrance age might impact students, teachers and parents. After four more discussions on the topic (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1996, January 23; 1996, January 30; 1996, February 13; 1996, February 27), the school committee voted to change the kindergarten entrance age to five years of age on or before 9/1. Reasons for the change included it was recommended by the Developmentally Appropriate Practices Committee, the state was requiring the 9/1 entrance date,
it promoted uniformity for all districts, these students were somewhat more mature and it would assist with space issues at the elementary schools (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1996, January 23).

During the 1997 – 1998 school year, staff from the Ponderosa Public School system successfully lobbied to implement full day kindergarten for the fall of 1998. According to an article in the November 26, 1997 issue of The Inquirer and Mirror, Bob Smith, a counselor at the Ponderosa Elementary School introduced the idea of full day kindergarten at previous week’s school committee meeting (Full-day kindergarten on the horizon, 1997). He promoted the benefits of full day kindergarten as more planning time for teachers, the ability to enrich the current program, the ability to cover topics in a single day, an increased sense of community for the classes, additional capacity to pace academics and preventing students from having to make additional environmental shifts during the school day. School committee member Luke Sylvia supported the philosophy but questioned whether kindergarten students could last all day. He also acknowledged finding child care for two and a half hours a day is challenging and asked that the committee have more time to seek input from parents and teachers. Six nights later, the Ponderosa Elementary School held an evening meeting to discuss a full-day kindergarten plan with ninety parents in attendance. The Inquirer and Mirror (Full-day kindergarten on the horizon, 1997) quoted Principal Jennifer White, parent Beverly Rowley and kindergarten teachers Pat Brooks and Nancy Howard as supporting the plan. Principal White stated the biggest benefit is the added time for learning. She proposed the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. Principal White said:

The time is there to really get involved in the activity without having it cut
short. The idea is not to add more things to the curriculum, the plan is to do that which we are doing now, but in greater depth. (Full-day kindergarten on the horizon, 1997)

Principal White’s hope is that with extended time teachers would be able to work more with individual students, and introduce more hands-on small and large group developmentally appropriate activities. As a parent volunteer, Ms. Howard agreed teachers have very little time to work with students. Principal White added many schools are implementing full day kindergarten programs, “There has been a trend nationwide. In the state of Massachusetts, there has been a gradual move to full day kindergartens as well” (Full-day kindergarten on the horizon, 1997). The kindergarten teachers proposed a full day kindergarten would allow teachers more time to accommodate different learning styles and to better service diverse learners rather than teach to the middle of the road (Full-day kindergarten on the horizon, 1997).

In response, the Ponderosa School Committee conducted a phone survey to next year’s incoming kindergarten parents and a written survey to all Ponderosa Elementary School parents and island preschool parents (School votes for all-day Grade K, 1998). When summarizing both surveys, 84% supported full day kindergarten while 14 % did not. Of those in support, seventy-nine % believed the program should be fully implemented in the first year. Fifty eight percent of respondents believed half day options should be offered. The Inquirer and Mirror (School votes for all-day Grade K, 1998) noted the school committee voted unanimously to support the concept but acknowledged they may not have the money to implement the plan.

An article in the July 2, 1998 issue of the Inquirer and Mirror (No full day for Grade K, 1998) alerted community members full day kindergarten would not start in the fall as expected.
Superintendent Blake said while the school committee members wanted to implement full day kindergarten, the proposed funding was lost during the spring budget process. Superintendent Blake explained due to a number of unanticipated expenditures, there’s no money left. After much debate, the final word is there will not be full day kindergarten this year. The Ponderosa School Committee’s previous decision to extend the kindergarten day by 45 minutes still stands. The school committee will review the possibility of supporting a full day kindergarten again next year. Parents have shared their support of full day kindergartens. The Inquirer and Mirror (No full day for Grade K, 1998) stated parents had previously shared national studies showing students who receive more early education perform better in school. While no further mention of implementing full day kindergartens was found in The Inquirer and Mirror, the Ponderosa Public School’s Superintendent’s Office confirmed that half day kindergarten ended in June of 1998 and full day kindergarten started in the fall of 1998 (D. McDonough, personal communication, April 1, 2013).

The Public’s Perception of Public Schools Twenty Years Later

Twenty years earlier, the Gallup Poll (Gallup, 1972) showed the general public had a high regard for the teaching profession, thought well of school curriculum and teachers and believed the main goals of elementary education were to get better jobs and teach students to get along with others in society. They perceived discipline as the biggest problem in public schools, blamed the home life when students were doing poorly and did not support lower the starting age for students. The 24th Annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Elam, 1992) interpreted its survey results to demonstrate that the public wants improvement and change in its public schools. Most participants support extending the school year to 210 days (55%), allowing social and welfare agencies to use public school buildings
(77%) and favor the distribution of condoms in public schools (68%). As have the large majorities for the past two decades, 71% of the participants favor the use of national standardized tests. The authors recognize the purpose of a public opinion poll is to determine what the public thinks, not to ascertain the significance of the data. They believe the poll shows the public wants and will support improvements in schools. Their interpretation (which they state the poll data supports) views this as a failure in leadership.

When asked the question “What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools of this community must deal?” lack of proper financial support (22%) and drug use (22%) tied for first place. This is the first time since 1971 that lack of proper financial support ranked first in the public’s concerns about public schools. Since 1986 drug use had been the top rated problem. Lack of discipline which has been a consistent concern throughout the years, was named by 17% of the participants. Nine percent of the responses named fighting, violence and gangs as the biggest problem for public schools.

Since 1974, every Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll includes a question about rating American public schools. The overall ratings have remained relatively stable since 1984. A low point was reached in 1983. It was noted the poll was conducted shortly after the publication of A Nation at Risk (Elam, 1992). Three questions were asked. First respondents were also asked to rate public schools in their community using a scale of A, B, C, D, or FAIL. The second question was “How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally -- A, B, C, D, or FAIL? Forty percent of the public rated their own schools as an A or a B while the nation’s public schools were only rated an A or a B by 18%. This ratio has been typical in past years. Finally, public school parents were again asked to rate the public school attended by their oldest child. Sixty-four percent of these parents gave
the school their oldest child attends an A or a B. The rankings suggest that the better people know the public schools, the higher their opinion of school quality.

The first national education goal announced by President Bush is that, by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. However it would be challenging to reach this goal without interventions. The study attempted to discover how much value the public placing on early care and education. Respondents were asked “Do you think that preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households would help them perform better in school in their teenage years?” Table 4.8 illustrates how different groups responded.

Table 4.8 Do Pre-School Programs for Disadvantaged Children Impact Later School Performance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parent of Public School Students %</th>
<th>Parents of Non Public School Students %</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>No Children in School %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Great Deal</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a Lot</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 demonstrates wide spread public support for preschool programs. The majority of respondents believe pre-school for disadvantaged children would impact their later school
performance either a great deal or quite a lot. When people were asked if they would be willing to fund free preschool programs for disadvantaged children, the responses were not as supportive. Forty-nine percent were willing to fund through increased taxes while 42% were unwilling and 9% were undecided.

Current events are sometimes portrayed in political cartoons and can serve as a valuable lens to study social phenomena (Hess & Northrop, 2011; Sani, Abdullah, Abdullah & Ali, 2012). The illustrations serve as a commentary and draws attention to current social or political issues in society (Hess & Northrop, 2011). Political cartoons are a powerful method of communication. They can set a social agenda by highlighting issues via mass media (Sani, et al., 2012) and/or influence public opinion (Hess & Northrop, 2011; Sani, et al., 2012). While the majority of respondents in the poll stated they favor standardized testing, Smaller’s Cartoon 4.1 of a preschool classroom’s agenda for the day seems to disagree with the emphasis on standardized testing.


No Child Left Behind Act 2001 through 2012

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 also known as NCLB is a federal law aimed at improving the performance of U.S. schools by increasing the standards of accountability, providing parents with more flexibility in choosing the schools their children will attend and promotes an increased focus on reading and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The
available resources for the East Haven Public Schools did not discuss the No Child Left Behind Act or kindergarten from the year 2001 to 2013.

In 2001, the Grayling Public School system proposed their district vision for full day kindergarten for all students. The Transitional Planning for Full-Day Kindergarten’s (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2001, January 23) proposal included an overview, description of the current status, a plan, timelines, linkages between school and community groups, letters of assurance of the school committee’s full support and the superintendent’s support to not displace public preschool and a budget. The proposal was a collaborative effort between the School Readiness Committee, the district Leadership Team, kindergarten teachers and the school committee. Full day kindergarten was identified as a high priority to increase learning time for students especially at risk students. As a first step, the district had piloted one full day kindergarten at Upper Westside Elementary School and one at Deaconess Elementary School in the fall. Each building also had three half day kindergartens. Both schools have a high percentage of disadvantaged students and low standardized testing scores. For the fourth grade 2000 English Language Arts MCAS test, Upper Westside had 80% of the students in the failing and needs improvement category while Deaconess had 87%. Each class had a teacher and a full time teacher assistant. Two barriers for the implementation of full day funding were a lack of space and the additional cost of staffing. Funding of $30,000 was received from the state’s Full Day Kindergarten Grant. While grant funding assists now, there is a concern that the grant program may end (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2001, January 23).

Assistant Superintendent O’Toole reported to the school committee on December 11, 2001 as a representative from the Early Childhood Curriculum Committee (Grayling Public Schools Meeting Notes, 2001, December 11). After studying research on early literacy, the
Early Childhood Curriculum Committee recommended to support full day kindergarten. The committee reported the research indicates students in longer school days achieve better in reading, demonstrate more independent reading, have more opportunities for learning activities and are less stressed. Teachers also reported having less stress because there’s more time for learning. Principal Jackson of Upper Westside Elementary School and kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Montana, both spoke about the positive benefits of the piloted full day kindergartens. The school committee approved the motion to endorse full day kindergarten to be phased in over the next two years by adding four sections each year.

Full day kindergarten for all students was not implemented within the next two years as intended. Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes (2002, October 22; 2003, June 10; 2003, December 9; 2004, January 24; 2004, February 10; 2004, February 24; 2005, February 8; 2005, March 1; 2005, March 8; 2005 May 3) show repeated budget concerns about the implementation of full day kindergartens. While the School Committee and school administrators continued to promote the concept, how to fund it especially when faced with multiple budget constraints was frequently discussed. Possible funding solutions included expanding the full day kindergarten grant (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2002, September 24; 2003, June 10), instituting a sliding fee scale for extra half day beyond what is required by law (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2003, December 9) and seeking a Proposition 2 ½ override exclusively for full day kindergarten (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2004, February 10; 2005, March 8). On February 8, 2005, Superintendent Leary, Assistant Superintendent O’Toole, Deaconess Elementary Principal King and a kindergarten teacher spoke about the benefits of full day kindergarten, the research demonstrating positive effects and justified the importance of full day kindergarten over the purchasing of supplies and materials for
other grades. Assistant Superintendent O’Toole told the school committee 55% of public
schools in the state of Massachusetts offered full day kindergarten programs in the 2003 – 2004
school year (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2005, February 8).

The March 1, 2005 and March 8, 2005 Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes (2005, 
March 1; 2005, March 8) indicate a parent committee “Full Day Now” had met with the
superintendent and assistant superintendent on February 28, 2005 to discuss funding for full day
kindergarten. They were concerned with the current inequality in the district with two
elementary schools offering full day and two elementary schools offering half day kindergarten.
Parents requested additional full day kindergartens in the West Grayling Elementary School and
the Topper Elementary School. They did not support pursuing an override (Grayling School
Committee Meeting Notes, 2005, March 1; 2005, March 8). The discussion about how to fund
full day kindergarten and bringing equality and fairness in education to all Grayling students
continued at the school committee meetings. On May 3, 2005, the school committee passed a
motion to expand kindergarten without fees (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2005, 
May 3).

Full day kindergarten in all the schools was implemented in the fall of 2005. However
discussions and concerns about maintaining and funding full day kindergarten continued
(Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 2006, January 10; 2008, March 25; 2009,
December 15). At times the school committee again discussed funding full day kindergarten
over supplies and staffing, reconsidering implementing fees and the fact that eliminating full day
kindergarten was not being considered.
Ponderosa Public School kindergarten teacher, Nancy Howard, reported to the school committee on June 2, 2009 about the kindergarten team looking at best practices (Ponderosa School Committee Meeting Notes, 2009, June 2). Adequate physical space in a classroom is important to promote a sense of play and hands on learning which is not teacher directed. The philosophy is that during the early years, learning needs to be initiated by the students rather than the teachers. The team is visiting with local preschools and having the preschool teachers visit the kindergarten classes.

**Attitudes and Beliefs about Teaching, Learning and Standardized Testing**

The 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Rose and Gallup, 2005) was framed around twenty conclusions they believe summarized the most significant findings of the poll. The question about the biggest problem in public schools has been asked consistently since 1969. For the first 16 years, the biggest problem was considered to be discipline. The use of drugs was the biggest concern until 1991 when it tied with lack of financial support. Respondents were asked “What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?” The top four responses were lack of financial support/funding/money (20%), overcrowded schools (11%), lack of discipline, more control (10%) and use of drugs/dope (9%). The researchers note lack of financial support has been considered the top problem for six straight years and among the top problems listed for the last fifteen years.

Americans continue to support and give strong grades to their local schools. Participants were asked three questions. First they were asked “Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in
your community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here – A, B, C, D, or FAIL?” They were then asked “How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally – A, B, C, D, or FAIL?” Forty-eight percent of the public rated their own schools as an A or a B while the nation’s public schools were only rated an A or a B by 24%. These responses have been typical in past years. Finally, public school parents were again asked to rate the public school attended by their oldest child. Sixty-nine percent of these parents gave the school their oldest child attends an A or a B. The rankings continue to suggest that the better people know the public schools, the higher their opinion of school quality.

The 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose and Gallup, 2005) proposes the testing mandates by NCLB and state level initiatives have resulted in an increase in standardized testing driving instruction. To measure the public’s opinion on the amount of testing, the following question was asked: “In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing in the public schools in your community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?” Table 4.9 illustrates the national percentage rates for the responses for years 2005, 2004, 2003, 2001 and 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>National %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too Much</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enough</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Amount</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 depicts the majority of respondents believe the emphasis on achievement testing is about the right amount but has been reduced by 3% since 2000. The percentage saying there is too much emphasis since 2000 has increased by 6%.

A commentary within the 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2005) written by Frederick Hess, Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D. C. states:

The American public doesn’t know a lot about No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has mixed feelings about the law itself, and is dubious about the statue’s machinery.

These results aren’t shocking. The implications could be another story. While the public embraces educational accountability in principle, it always hesitates when faced with the messy reality. The poll results depict antipathy toward key NCLB components, use of subgroups, and uniform state performance standards for schools and students…….Most respondents think their schools are fine and that schools have a pretty limited ability to close the achievement gap…….

This skepticism isn’t about to melt away. Respondents who know ‘a great deal’ about NCLB are no more supportive of its provisions – aside from the requirement to disaggregate performance date by student subgroups –
than anyone else. Whether proponents can find a way to persuade the public

that NCLB is necessary, effective, and sensibly designed will likely determine

the fate of this landmark legislation. (p. 47)

A second commentary written by Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education
believes we need to listen to the public. The public tells us teaching to the test is wrong. “We
should respond by shifting our focus away from standardized testing and placing a greater
emphasis on quality teaching and making our schools exciting community learning centers. This
will require some midcourse corrections in NCLB” (p 49).

The Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2005) illustrated the public’s difference of opinion
about standardized testing. In 2005, forty percent of the respondents stated there was the right
amount of standardized testing while thirty-six percent stated there was too much standardized
testing. Political cartoons at that time highlighted the political debate about standardized testing.
Wildt’s cartoon (2007) appears to illustrate the public’s concern with No Child Left Behind,
standardized testing and its impact on families and curriculum.
Cartoon 4.2: Welcome to pre-natal kindergarten.

“Welcome to pre-natal kindergarten. First we'll review your pre-born’s curriculum and then I'll assign womb numbers.”

Cartoon 4.2 was first published on November 7, 2007. (Wildt, C. 2007, November 7. Welcome to pre-natal kindergarten (Cartoon). Licensing fee purchased from Artizans).

**The Current Kindergarten Experience**

The current kindergarten experience shows some similarities and some differences among the three participating school districts. All three districts offer only full day kindergarten and qualify for Title One funds. Table 4.10 illustrates the current similarities and differences among the three school districts studied.
### Table 4.10: Current Comparison Between Studied Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>East Haven</th>
<th>Grayling</th>
<th>Ponderosa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Kindergarten Classes</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kindergarten Class Sizes</strong></td>
<td>25-32</td>
<td>15.5-18.6</td>
<td>21 - 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Reading Street</td>
<td>Pearson Reading Street</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Context for Learning among others including Every Day Math</td>
<td>Piloted half the classes in Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Math in Focus and the other half new Every Day Math</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Math Expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Teacher Assistants in Kindergarten Classes</strong></td>
<td>Approximately .5</td>
<td>16 assigned .5 to kindergarten</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same or Different Report Cards as Elementary Grades</strong></td>
<td>different</td>
<td>different</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same or Different Frequency of Report Card Distribution</strong></td>
<td>different</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Issues Identified</strong></td>
<td>ELL, high number of students with social/emotional challenges, 55% of students enter with no preschool experience</td>
<td>Tension between developmental model and state endorsed skills based model</td>
<td>ELL, space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yearly Required District Assessments</strong></td>
<td>DIBLES, district created benchmark, weekly/unit tests, Addvantage, Reading Street</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.10 shows significant differences in the sizes of the three public school districts but similar curriculum and special issues.

All of the kindergarten classes in the Ponderosa Public School kindergartens are housed at the Ponderosa Elementary School. School hours are from 7:35 a.m. to 2:20 p.m. The school has three reading interventionists with one assigned to grades K-1, another to grades 2-3 and the third to grades 4-5. Reading supports are not available for kindergarten students until January. Teacher assistants are available for students with needs documented on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Principal Sandy Elliott of the Ponderosa Elementary School identified English Language Learners (ELL) and spacing problems as a special issue impacting their kindergarten program (personal communication, March 29, 2013). She estimated out of 105 kindergarten students, 35-40 of them did not speak English and half of the kindergarten population never attended preschool. Two Spanish speaking teacher assistants provide translator and academic assistance to the ELL students. To address the significant language needs of these students, Ponderosa Public Schools offers a free Summer Boost program for incoming kindergarteners. ELL students and students with no preschool experience are encouraged to attend summer school at no cost to help prepare students for their upcoming kindergarten experience.

The teacher assistants also assist families of the ELL students with translations and advising how to get needed services such as applying to get green cards. Many of these families are transient and work the warmer months on Ponderosa and the colder months in a warmer climate. Parents may not be able to come to the school due to long work hours. When families
from other countries go home to visit, they tend to leave for extended periods such as one to two months which interrupts the student’s education.

Principal Elliott (personal communication, March 29, 2013) also cited the need for more classroom space in the Ponderosa Elementary School. Plans are being proposed on how to build two more classrooms utilizing space inside the building. While overcrowding is a concern, the kindergarten classrooms in current use vary in size. Kindergarten teachers (personal communication, March 29, 2013) state some classrooms are adequate size and others are too small for the number of students. All of the classrooms have smart boards in them. It was also noted by Principal Elliott that even after having full day kindergarten for thirteen years, at budget time there’s typically an annual discussion about going back to half day kindergarten.

Current Attitudes and Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

Betting on Teachers: the 43rd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011) is a scientifically based survey of about 1,000 Americans 18 years and older. While longitudinal data can show changes over time. New questions help to define emerging issues. New questions in this survey included asking about digital education, students of military families, charter schools, vouchers and choices and how to grade President Obama’s performance in support of public schools using an A through Fail scale.

This survey recognized there has been recent negative press about teachers and education – documentary films, opinion articles in newspapers, blogs, etc. They attempted to measure the public’s opinion and summarized that Americans understand the importance of highly effective teachers. When asked “Would you like to have a child of yours take up teaching in the public
schools as a career?”, 67% of respondents said yes. When asked “Do you have trust and confidence in the men and women who are teaching children in the public schools?”, 71% said yes. When asked “Should education policies require teachers to follow a prescribed curriculum so all students can learn the same content, or should education policies give teachers flexibility to teach in ways they think best?”, 73% of respondents favored giving teachers flexibility.

The survey (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011) again asked Americans “What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?” An overwhelming majority (36%) believe lack of financial support/funding/money is the main problem. Other responses included overcrowded schools (6%), lack of discipline/more control (6%), fighting/violence/gangs (3%) and use of drugs/dope (2%).

Respondents were again asked to rate both local public schools and nation-wide public schools by giving them an A, B, C, D or Fail. Fifty-one % of Americans rated their local public schools an A or a B. Only 17% of the respondents rated public schools across the nation as an A or a B. When asked “Using the A, B, C, D, and Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?”, 79% of respondents rated the school as either an A or a B.

Local newspapers portray differing views on attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning. Golsalves (2013) writes about the politics of early education in the Cape Cod Times. In his comparison of state Representative David Vieira of Falmouth and Governor Deval Patrick, Gonsalves notes both politicians believe in investing in early education and care. Quality early education and care, or EEC, promotes academic achievement, lessens reliance on social services, increases the number of students in college and decreases the number in rehab or jail and encourages future entrepreneurs and innovators. Buzzelli’s (2013) editorial agrees that high
quality early education is a great economic investment which results in long term benefits for students. She supports President Obama’s call for universal pre-kindergarten. Burke (2013) disagrees with Obama’s and Buzzelli’s claims of long term benefits. Burke reports that Obama’s “return on investment” figures represent wishful thinking. Burke notes researchers Dalmia and Snell determined universal preschool has failed to reduce the achievement gap between white and black children. Burke points to the failed Head Start program where nearly $8 billion per year have consistently failed to reap any returns.

When looking at how to improve public schools, the April 3, 2013 editorial in the Cape Cod Times (We need better parents, 2013) noted they had recently supported a major new initiative to invest in early education programs in Massachusetts. A reader responded “more money for early ed overlooks the single most important cause of reading deficiencies in youngsters – the parents” (p. A10) and reminded the editors about a study they had previously reported on. Researchers from the Program for International Student Assessment studied how parents raised their kids and compared that with test scores of the students. The findings were published in October 2011 and that regardless of socioeconomic background, students whose parents read to them in their early school years scored better in reading as fifteen year olds. The editors and the reader proposed some of the money intended for early education be reallocated to teach high school students the basics of responsible/successful parenting.

Another reader wrote in to the editorial section on April 1, 2013 from the Cape Cod Times (MCAS provides a goal, 2013) suggesting a solution to the educational problem of preschool. If the goal is to educate to high standards and score well on third grade MCAS, preschool through second grade teachers need to be provided with structured curriculum and the
tools and training to get students there. Students need to enter kindergarten ready to succeed in language, vocabulary, numeracy, literacy and behaviors.

In an article in a local parents newspaper, Johnson (2013) proposes young children aren’t ready to assimilate abstract concepts. She proposes the real work of early childhood is cultivating imagination through play, mastering through sensory experiences and learning good will through imitation. If allowed to do the work of play as is developmentally suited to young children, they will be ready at the appropriate time for academics. In an interview in the May 5, 2013 Boston Sunday Globe, Onion (2013) shares Amy Ogata’s views that the Cold War was the root of America’s obsession with fostering childhood play. Ogata argues that during the Cold War, American’s worried how to set themselves apart on the world stage. In an effort to surpass Russian children, Americans promoted creativity, individualism and technological progress. The political climate of promoting creativity or fostering the natural resources of children transformed how parents approached child-rearing, how schools and home were designed and how toys were sold.

Today the political debate about the goals and curriculum for kindergarten continue. Political cartoons draw attention to the changes in kindergarten. Morgan (2013) appears to illustrate the belief that the kindergarten experience has changed significantly over time.
Cartoon 4.3: I remember when they actually drew these without Photoshop.

"I remember when they actually drew these without Photoshop."

Cartoon 4.3 was first published on April 3, 2013. (Morgan, R. 2013, April 3, I remember when they actually drew these without photoshop (Cartoon). Licensing fee purchased from Artizans).

Summary

Data about the history of the kindergarten experience was collected from three southeastern Massachusetts school districts: East Haven, Grayling and Ponderosa. Differences and similarities were noted between districts. These experiences were framed around major educational turning points and the attitudes and beliefs of the general population about teaching and learning. Similarities with the districts included they all started with half day kindergartens and eventually changed to full day kindergartens; the original curriculums were play based with
child-centered instruction and are now more skill based with teacher-directed instruction and physical spaces provided for kindergarten classrooms have improved over time. Change agents involved in impacting the kindergarten experience include funding sources, political influences and legislation, high-stakes testing, societal and parental pressures and media influence.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings and Implications of Practice

This chapter is a discussion of the research findings embedded within a discussion bringing together the purpose of the study, the literature review, the research questions and the theoretical framework shaping this study. The findings will be presented to inform early childhood educators, parents and policy makers what the kindergarten experience was like historically, what it looks like now and how attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. This chapter will be organized in the following sections: (1) Statement of the Problem, (2) Purpose and Research Questions, (3) Research Procedures, (4) Summary and Discussion of the Findings, (5) Implications, (6) Validity and (7) Summary.

Statement of the Problem

The kindergarten experience and attitudes and beliefs about it have transformed over time. Currently there is substantial debate among parents, early childhood educators and policy makers about the purposes and goals of kindergarten and the optimum method to achieve these goals (Vecchiott, 2001). The philosophy of the original model of kindergarten is children will gain social, emotional and academic skills through their natural curiosity and enthusiasm to learn. Kindergarten emphasized learning through play and socialization while educating the whole child (Lee, et al., 2006, p. 106). This model is also referred to as traditional or developmentally appropriate. The philosophy of a skill based model is the earlier acquisition of discrete skills such as reading and math better prepares students for first grade and allows them to better achieve in school. This model promotes the goal of preparing students for first grade academics through the use of formal structured lessons (Lee, et al., p. 106).

The problem of practice has been an on-going debate for many years. What are the goals of kindergarten? Should the goals of kindergarten today reflect Froebel’s philosophy of
nurturing the whole child in an environment where children could develop their mental, social and emotional facilities through play, music and movement before starting the formal rigors of the academic system (Lee, et al., 2006)? Or should today’s kindergarten’s goals be to promote the earlier acquisition of discrete skills such as reading and math to allow students to achieve better in school? In Grayling Public Schools, this became a major debate four years ago when the kindergarten curriculum was changed from a thematic, developmental approach to a program with formal structured lessons. Many teachers passionately protested the deemphasizing of educating the whole child through play and socialization while administrators stressed the benefits of structured lessons improving student’s academic skills. The debate caused this researcher to wonder about the changing kindergarten experiences and the reasons behind it.

**Positionality of Researcher**

One of the limitations of a historical research study is researcher personal bias. It was necessary to acknowledge how this researcher’s positionality biased their epistemology. Understanding how we know what we know is a necessary skill for lifelong learning which fosters introspection, analysis and open and joyous communication (Takacs, 2003). Upon introspection, this researcher realized that another perspective of personal bias is having great passion about the topic. While this researcher did not attend kindergarten, it was not viewed as having a negative impact educationally. The social skills curriculum popular in the early 1960’s was more than emphasized at home by both parents and by neighbors who felt comfortable acting in loco parentis. Having a stay at home mother, being the oldest of six children and living in a closely knit neighborhood with dozens of friends provided ample opportunities for practice. Currently, most parents work, families are smaller and neighbors tend to be more isolated. With
today’s increased academic demands in kindergarten, students who do not attend kindergarten are at risk academically and socially.

When this researcher first started working as an elementary school counselor, the most frequently requested social skills group was anger management. As the academic demands of the elementary curriculum increased, the most frequently requested social skill group became how to manage anxiety. Teachers reported increased incidents of student frustration, work avoidance and decreased self esteem and confidence. Parents reported even their academically capable, well behaved children were crying about the stressors of school. When this researcher first worked as a special education team chair, very few kindergarten students were referred for evaluations for academic or social/emotional reasons. Now it’s much more common. Elementary teachers today report many students present with a lack of self-regulation skills. Some students who were not explicitly and consistently taught those skills in kindergarten, do well in school anyway. Other students may not be ready to learn and disrupt the learning of their classmates. As educators, we want all of our students to be successful. It’s disconcerting when young students are stressed about the curriculum demands, more commonly identified as having educational disabilities and lacking in self regulation skills. Any of these conditions can cause a student to feel inadequate and believe they aren’t good at school. These negative feelings and beliefs can be extremely difficult to alter when developed this early in a child’s educational career. This educational problem is significant. It is imperative that educators study the best way to teach our youngest students in order for them to learn and feel successful.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to examine the kindergarten experience and an emergent academic approach to the kindergarten experience from a historical perspective. The two
research questions guiding this research paper were: (1) How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time? (2) How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom? This researcher also formed a hypothesis that educational changes in kindergarten were the result of political and social pressures more so than educational research or best practice.

These two questions were viewed within a theoretical framework of the following developmental theorists: Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. The theories address how young children learn best. While both theorists promote developmentally appropriate practices, they disagree on when a child is ready to learn. The questions were framed around these theories.

The significance of the problem is great as changes in the kindergarten experience impacts a large majority of students across the county. It is important for educators, families and policy makers to understand how and why the kindergarten experience has changed and how these changes transform the experiences of students and the practices of teachers. Historical research can provide insight into the transformation of kindergarten, the change agents involved and allow for discussion on the impact of the changed kindergarten experience.

The practical goal of this research study was to document changes in kindergarten in general and specifically by comparing three local communities. Stakeholders need to understand what the kindergarten experience looks like today, what’s it’s goals are and are we teaching young children in the manner they can best learn?
Research Procedures

This qualitative historical research study examined how and why the kindergarten experience has changed over time. Goodson (1985) stressed the prime purpose of studying history was to utilize the knowledge gained to address current educational problems. The educational problem being addressed is how various influences have changed attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students over time and the change in kindergarten goals.

Busha and Harter’s (1980) six essential steps for conducting historical research were utilized. First, a historical problem or the need for historical knowledge was identified. Then relevant sources of historical information as possible were located. When appropriate, a hypothesis is formed that tentatively explains relationships between historical factors. The resources and evidence are verified for authenticity and veracity of information and its sources and then organized. Then the most pertinent collected evidence is selected, organized and analyzed. Finally conclusions are presented in a meaningful narrative.

The participants in this research study were three southeastern Massachusetts public school districts: East Haven, Grayling and Ponderosa. The sampling strategy was to choose districts which provide maximum variation, in the same area of the state with relative ease of ability to gain access to the research sites. The districts vary in size, demographics and finances. The East Haven Public School district is located within a large, urban industrial city. The Grayling Public School district is located in a smaller, coastal, suburban community while Ponderosa Public School district is located on a small rural island town thirty miles off the coast.
Validity

Frankel & Wallen (2009) state that historical research cannot be controlled for threats of researcher bias, history (other events) and maturation. Busha and Harter (1980) caution historical research is unable to control for threats of internal validity. However, steps were taken to assure the highest level of validity possible. This researcher thoroughly acknowledged personal biases and diligently worked to not allow them to color interpretations or conclusions. History and maturation were considered with a critical attitude when reviewing relevant resources. Sources were scrutinized for external (genuineness of document) and internal (the accuracy of the contents) criticism. The majority of resources came from public documents which community members had the right to contradict if they felt the documents were not genuine or accurate. However, a negative is some data was only found in one document without corroborating evidence from other sources. Buscha and Harter (1980) advise evidence should not be examined from only one point of view.

Another limitation is the different access availability and styles of record keeping allowed for varying amounts of data collected. East Haven’s school committee meeting notes are very business-like. They discuss what bills are being paid, where teachers are assigned to and provide an array of statistics such as the percentage of students who attended school that month. They did not detail discussions about educational problems or philosophies. However, the absence of evidence does not mean those discussions didn’t happen, just that they weren’t recorded. Grayling’s school committee meeting notes contained lengthy discussions about educational problems and solutions. Most of Ponderosa’s school committee meeting notes were not available to this researcher.
Summary and Discussion of Findings

While the school districts of East Haven, Grayling and Ponderosa all started with half day kindergartens and currently have full day kindergarten classes, the kindergarten experience in each district varied and the time lines varied significantly. The East Haven Public School District started half day kindergarten classes in 1892 nearly sixty-one years before Grayling Public Schools and seventy-two years before the Ponderosa Public School District. East Haven public schools were also the first to adopt full day kindergarten classes in 1958. Ponderosa had not yet started half day kindergarten classes until six years later and adopted full day kindergarten classes forty years later in 1998. Both districts switched from half day to full day kindergarten classes throughout their districts. Grayling first introduced full day kindergartens fifty-two years after starting half day programs by piloting one full day kindergarten class in two of the four elementary schools.

The earliest kindergarten experiences varied between districts. East Haven Public School District started kindergarten in 1892 with no mention found of any educational debate, goals, curriculum or funding source. However, the annual school reports did document the negative general conditions of the school system at the time. At that time, truancy and serious illnesses were significant problems. School buildings were deemed unsafe, overcrowded and unsuitable. East Haven rated poorly in comparison to other Massachusetts towns on student expenditure, percentage of valuation appropriated for public schools and ratio of attendance. After public and strong advocating by the East Haven School Committee to the City Council, 1893 saw general school conditions improve after ample provisions were provided to increase the school accommodations.
In 1893, 105 kindergarten students attended two half day classes. The kindergarten class size ranged from 45 – 54 students per class in the next three years. Superintendent Laramee (1895) discussed how kindergarten teachers taught students differently than other teachers. These teachers demonstrated the spirit of kindergarten instruction by directing the natural activities of children by leading rather than by driving with a harsh spirit. The number of kindergarten classes grew throughout different parts of the city in response to petitions by a large number of citizens requesting kindergarten classes in their parts of the city and a free kindergarten funded by The Kindergarten Association. Superintendent Clark expressed the value of the free kindergarten and how it supported non-English speaking families in learning the English language. He also stated adding kindergartens is becoming more generally recognized as a valuable way of training especially in cities. The number of kindergartens being publicly supported is also rapidly increasing.

Grayling Public Schools first discussed starting kindergarten classes in 1952 in response to multiple requests from parents. Over the next months, lengthy discussions were held at school committee meetings about the implementation, entrance age, financing, staffing and purposes of kindergarten. Half day kindergarten (morning and afternoon sessions) was implemented in the fall of 1953 with approval to establish classrooms of thirty students per teacher. The district ran into a shortage of qualified kindergarten teachers and administrators were given permission to hire highly recommended kindergarten teachers without following typical hiring practices. Morning sessions were from 8:40 a.m. to 11:20 a.m. while afternoon sessions were from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Grades one through five went to school from 8:50 a.m. to 2:10 p.m. During the first year of kindergarten, kindergarten teachers met weekly to develop the aims of the program. Superintendent Norton said building a background for education, learning new words,
learning how to act in groups and how to get along with other children were good arguments for sending a child to kindergarten.

As enrollment in the public kindergarten increased over the years, there were repeated concerns expressed about overcrowding or space issues for kindergarten. Data showed Grayling public schools also had numerous discussions about the funding of kindergarten as the program grew.

Documentation showed Ponderosa Public Schools first discussed the possibility of public kindergarten in 1889. While the school committee took no action, a private citizen offered to fund a teacher’s salary, desks, seats, a table and chairs in order to open a free kindergarten. Kindergarten was held one afternoon a week. In 1964, the school district opened its first public half day kindergarten program. The first year, there was a combined total of 56 students for both sessions. The superintendent and vocational students converted an unused storeroom into a band room which kindergarten was allowed to use. Interestingly while the entrance age for incoming first graders was clearly defined, there was no entrance age identified for incoming kindergarten students.

Research Question 1

How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?

Kindergarten as a Unique Learning Environment

Originally kindergarten was allowed to function as a unique learning environment different than the elementary grades (Cuban, 1992). Its curriculum was based on child development knowledge (Goffin, 1989), emphasized the importance of the whole child using play and toy materials in a nonacademic climate (Cuban, 1992) and focused on the importance of
a partnership with parents and families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Meisels and Shonkoff (2000) stated education at this age was thought to be developmental rather than instructional. In fact, early formal academic instruction was viewed as detrimental to a student’s development. Elizabeth Peabody opened the first English-speaking kindergarten in Boston in 1860. De Cos stated (as cited in Russell, 2012) she promoted kindergarten students should be gently taught via games, pictures, flowers, music and curious objects. She described the kindergarten curriculum as play, outside activities, flexible physical environments with the exclusion of traditional academic subjects (Ross, 1976). Kindergarten is the only grade to have been implemented as a half day program.

Documentation of attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students was not found for when kindergarten was introduced by the Ponderosa Public School system. However the free kindergarten started by a private citizen in 1889 only met one afternoon per week. This implies a more casual attitude about kindergarten students learning since higher grades went to school five days a week. Both Grayling Public Schools and East Haven Public Schools documented a non-academic belief toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students when kindergarten first started.

Superintendent Norton of Grayling Public Schools stated a child entering kindergarten at age five years six months is often not ready to read at that time. Children need their eyes to be able to focus on a printed page or flat plane before they should be encouraged to read. Kindergarten students are not ready for reading at that young age (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, November 2). While children learn to work together, the focus is not on reading. Instead children are extending their own basic interests, experiencing a sense of
security and achievement and progressing according to their own needs. Teachers developed the goals of the kindergarten program.

East Haven’s Superintendent Clark illustrated the attitude that kindergarten teaching is different than other grades. He described teachers who have caught the spirit of kindergarten as those who direct the natural activities of childhood rather than the harsh spirit which is demanded by the educational spirit of the times. He recognized that kindergarten provides the value of training young people which is becoming more generally recognized especially in cities.

This early model of kindergarten most closely resembles the traditional kindergarten of educating the whole child through play and socialization. Developmental theorist Piaget and Vygotsky appear to support this model. Vygotsky (1978) agreed with Piaget on the importance of both play and a child’s speech and their actions in order for a child to achieve whatever goal they were striving for. Play, language and actions are required elements of problem solving for children. In fact, sometimes young children cannot achieve a task if they are required to be silent.

**Attitudes from Parents, Teachers and Legislation**

Attitudes from parents, first grade teachers and political legislation have resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstien, 2007). A theme of accountability was noted throughout the data collection. In 1971, Grayling School committee member Mrs. Harrington commented on the public’s attitude toward schools. She said teachers need to be aware that they serve the public and the public has an ever increasing demand for accountability (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971, April 27). The first documented conversation about standardized testing found by the Grayling School Committee was in 1975 (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1975, October 28).
In The Fourth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes toward Education (Gallup, 1972), the public viewed the number one problem of public schools as a lack of discipline. They also rated the curriculum and teachers as the top answers for what’s right with your local public schools. The overall results of the poll showed the general public had a high regard for the teaching profession. Twenty years later, the 24th Annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public’s (Elam, 1992) showed the general public wants improvement and change in its public schools. Seventy-one percent of participants favor the use of national standardized tests. The poll’s interpretation of the results is there is a failure in leadership. The response to what’s the biggest problem in public schools was tied between a lack of financial support and drug use.

In 2005, the 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2005) proposed the testing mandates by NCLB and state initiatives have resulted in an increase of teaching to the test. The public was asked if there was too much emphasis on achievement testing in public schools, not enough emphasis or about the right amount. A slightly increasing majority of the public stated there is too much emphasis. A commentary by Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education writes the public is telling us teaching to the test is wrong and we need to listen (Rose & Gallup, 2005). A second commentary by Hess, Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise institute in Washington, D. C. (Rose & Gallup, 2005) states most respondents think their schools are fine. While the public embraces accountability in education in principle, they are hesitant in reality and are oppositional toward NCLB.

Current Curriculum

Currently, all three school districts promote academically based kindergarten programs. East Haven Public Schools and Grayling Public Schools use the Pearson Reading Street program for their English Language Arts curriculum while Ponderosa Public Schools use Houghton
Mifflin Harcourt Journeys program. The math curriculum used in the 2012-2013 school year in Ponderosa Public Schools is the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Math Expressions. The East Haven Public Schools used a combination of Context for Learning along with other programs including Every Day Math. Grayling Public Schools had half their classrooms pilot the updated version of Every Day Math and half pilot Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Math in Focus. These programs teach through formal structured lessons with the goal to increase discrete skills in reading and math. These kindergarten programs closely align with the formal model of kindergarten which is preparing children for first grade academics. Graue (2009) states rather than teaching kindergarteners how to tie their shoes, we now expect them to read. Booher-Jennings (2005) states in addition to having to support children’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth, kindergarten now has to start to prepare students for high-stakes standardized testing.

**Applying the Theoretical Framework**

In general, developmental theorists favor developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms or the traditional model. However, when considering differences in academic readiness in individual children and the changes in culture which have occurred, Vygotsky’s philosophy on children learning appears to be more supportive of this model than Piaget’s philosophy. Piaget stresses the sequence of his developmental steps are fixed. While all children must pass through the stages in the same order, the timing and rate can vary (Piaget, 1952; Pulaski, 1971; Singer & Reversion, 1997). Piaget does not believe kindergarten age students are yet capable of communicating with others in order to share thoughts. At that age, their only purpose is to play (Piaget, 1955). Singer & Reversion (1997) concluded from Piaget’s research that children learn by doing. The formal model of kindergarten has fewer hands on activities than the traditional model.
Vygotsky also promoted the importance of play, language and actions in young children’s learning (Vygotsky, 1978). However he also stressed the importance of culture defining what knowledge and skills are valued and taught. As the culture changed over time, earlier knowledge of discrete skills become more highly valued. Discrete skills were therefore most likely taught earlier in homes and preschool programs. Vygotsky recognized individual students could present with differing levels of ability dependent upon levels of social support. If social supports are now more intact, then today’s kindergarten student may be more capable of doing more academic work. Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of zone of proximal development states a more skilled or competent adult or peer collaborates with a child to move them from where they are (their current competency) to slightly beyond that to where they can be with assistance.

However both theorists stress the importance of working with children at their level of competency. Today’s kindergarten programs expect students to adapt to the curriculum. Piaget and Vygotsky would expect the curriculum to adapt to the students.

**Research Question 2**

How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?

The data collected suggests political and social influences greatly impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten experience. Influences include federal and state laws, school committees, parents, teachers and the general public. Some examples include in 1892, the East Haven City Council received repeated petitions from teachers and students for improved school conditions. The East Haven School Committee sent a strongly worded communication to the City Council criticizing the conditions of the schools, the rankings of the school district and lack of funding from the City Council. The school committee reminded
the City Council their seemingly “indifference seriously interferes with the duties and function of said committee” (City of East Haven, 1892, p. 17). The next year the school committee commented on the ample provisions then provided to improve school accommodations. The first kindergarten classes were started that year.

**Parent and Community Influences**

A kindergarten class was added in the eastern section of East Haven in 1895 after a large number of citizens petitioned Superintendent Clark. Social influences included a group of community members independently opening and completely funding a free kindergarten. Superintendent Clark stated it was a valuable program especially as it offered special preparation in English to non-English speaking families.

Grayling Public School District started kindergarten after multiple requests from parents. Parents believed kindergarten was a needed transition year for children between home and regular school. Superintendent Norton expressed a desire to discuss the idea and associated costs with citizens. He expressed the attitude that kindergarten should promote readiness for learning and social skills. Children at this age were not ready for reading (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1952, November 25). Funding and the entrance age for kindergarten students remained a consistent debate between the school committee and parents for many years. The desire to hire qualified kindergarten teachers was illustrated when administrators were authorized to hire highly recommended teachers outside of the typical hiring practices and at higher pay rates than elementary teachers. The first year of kindergarten, teachers met weekly to develop the goals of the program. Through the years overcrowding was a reoccurring problem. The
most common solution was to move kindergarten classes outside of the schools until state law no longer allowed schools to use buildings not owned by taxpayers.

Grayling parents were given frequent opportunities to voice their opinions with school administrators and at school committee meetings. In fact in 1953, the school committee answered a phone call from a threatening parent during their meeting. In 1962, the school committee asked teachers for their opinions on lowering the entrance age to kindergarten. The next year the school committee vocalized their vision of the five major levels of education one of which was kindergarten for 5-6 year olds. Despite repeated requests by parents to lower the entrance age, the committee explained most children benefit from waiting to enter kindergarten. The explanation was the delay improves student accommodations and reduces the incidence of retardation.

While the Ponderosa School Committee supported starting kindergarten as early as 1889, it was not started until seventy-five years later. The class was held in a renovated storeroom and an entrance age was not identified. A resident of Boston who was visiting the island funded the first private kindergarten on the island in 1890. The class met one afternoon a week. The push for full day kindergarten in Ponderosa was initiated by a school counselor and strongly supported by parents. Educators spoke about the benefits of more planning time and the allowing teachers more time to accommodate different learning styles. A school committee member and parents spoke about full day kindergarten eliminating the difficulty of finding child care for two and a half hours a day. After ninety parents attended a meeting and incoming kindergarten parents were surveyed, 84% of parents supported full day kindergarten. However 58% of the parents believed half day options should also be offered (School votes for all day Grade K, 1998). More recently Ponderosa Public Schools has responded to an influx of English Language Learners and
students presenting with no preschool experience into the kindergarten programs. Spanish speaking teacher assistants and a free Summer Boost program for incoming kindergarteners have been added to help prepare students for kindergarten.

**Political Influences**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 represented the first time federal dollars would have a role in public school policies (Duffy, et al., 2008). Funding was a consistent theme in the data about why kindergarten classes were not started or expanded to full day and whether there was sufficient funding to continue with kindergarten programs. In 1966, the Department of Education mandated that all districts have to have school for at one hundred and eighty days with twenty-five hours per week at the elementary level. This included kindergarten classes. In 1967, state legislation mandated all school districts to offer half day kindergartens by 1972 and set an entrance age. This new entrance age presented a dilemma for Grayling Public Schools. Since it was four months lower than their current entrance age, it could result in a large bulge in the kindergarten class size of 1972. Their solution was to drop the entrance age by one month for the next four years in order to avoid an oversized class and comply with the state’s required entrance age (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1967).

In the 1970’s, Grayling’s kindergarten report cards were different than the elementary grades. They were produced less frequently and reported on a student’s physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth. School committee members expressed the belief that kindergarten class rooms should be specially designed to include enough space for small group
work, individual conferences, centers and to allow for freedom of movement. They were built larger than regular classrooms.

In 1971, a Grayling School Committee member made the first documented comment about the public’s every increasing demand for accountability (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1971. April 27). Standardized testing was first discussed by the Grayling School Committee in 1974. The Fourth Annual Gallop Poll of Public Attitudes toward Education (Gallup, 1972) defined elementary schools as grades 1-6. In general the public demonstrated a high regard for the teaching profession. They rated curriculum and teachers highly and believed the number one problem of public schools is a lack of discipline. They described the goals of education as to get better jobs, to get along better with people in society and to make more money/achieve financial success. When children did poorly in school, most respondents blamed the child’s home life.

**Attitudes and Beliefs**

Since 1974, every Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa educational poll asked the American public to rate American schools. Since 1984 the overall ratings have remained relatively stable except for a low point in 1983. It was noted the poll was conducted shortly after the publication of A Nation at Risk. A Nation at Risk was a report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education proclaiming the K-12 educational achievement was declining and imperiling our technological and economic status (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). By 1992, the 24th Annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools demonstrated the public wanted improvement and change in its public schools. They now favored the use of national standardized tests.
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 increased the standards of accountability for schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). That same year, Grayling Public Schools identified full day kindergarten as a high priority to increase learning time for at all but especially at risk students. The two schools selected to pilot full day kindergartens were chosen because of their high percentage of disadvantaged students and low standardized testing scores. Barriers to implementing the pilot programs were funding and a lack of space. The district received $30,000 from the state’s Full Day Kindergarten Grant.

By 2005, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Rose & Gallup, 2005) showed Americans continued to support and give strong grades to their local schools. When asked about the emphasis of achievement testing in public schools, 40% of the respondents said it was about the right amount and 36% said it was too much. In 2011, the survey recognized recent negative press about teachers and education – blogs, documentary films, opinion articles in newspapers, etc. Despite the negative press, 71% of respondents expressed having trust and confidence in public school teachers. Seventy-three % favored giving teachers flexibility to teach in ways they think best. Local newspapers provided differing opinions on the effectiveness of the benefits of quality early education and what quality early education looks like.

Hypothesis

The researcher’s hypothesis that educational changes in kindergarten were the result of political and social pressures more so than educational research or best practice appears to have been supported by the data. Significant political and social influences on kindergarten were described as legislation which utilized high-stakes testing as an instrument of reform (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Curwood, 2007; Earley, 2000; Elkind, 1989; Fromberg, 2006; Graue, 2009;
Hatch, 2002; Kotansky, 2003; Miller & Almon, 2009; Pipho, 2000; Russell, 2011; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Williamson, et al., 2005), parental pressure (Fromberg, 2006; Fung, 2009; Goldstein, 1998; Graue, 2009; Lee, et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1988) and the media (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Russell, 2011). Duffy, et al. (2008) described A Nation at Risk as the most influential report on education in the past few decades. Both federal and state legislation impacted kindergarten. The data showed the state of Massachusetts passed legislation requiring districts to offer half day kindergartens and later promoted full day kindergartens by offering grant funding. Many examples were found where political bodies or parents petitioned or lobbied school committees, City Council or superintendents which resulted in educational changes. The East Haven School district implemented kindergarten after the School Committee highlighted the subpar school conditions in a strongly worded communication to the City Council. Superintendent Clark opened more kindergarten classes in response to petitions from citizens. The Grayling School Committee first discussed starting kindergarten in response to parent requests. Over the years class sizes were set in conjunction with the local teachers union. After years of lobbying for full day kindergarten, Grayling Public Schools was successful in piloting the change after receiving state grant money. Full day kindergarten was adopted by Ponderosa Public Schools after a phone survey to the next year’s incoming kindergarten parents and a written survey to all elementary and preschool parents demonstrated strong support. A local newspaper wrote multiple articles about the discussions, the approval of full day kindergarten, the reversal of the decision due to financial problems and the eventual resolution.

Educational research and best practices were mentioned far fewer times in the resources than political and social pressures. The following are the only times found that educational
research or best practices were mentioned when discussing kindergarten in the three districts since the implementation of kindergarten. The Grayling School Committee set the entrance age for kindergarten students in agreement with a Harvard Field Studies Survey (Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes, 1953, January 6). The Developmentally Appropriate Practices Committee in Grayling recommended the school committee change the kindergarten entrance age in 1995. While advocating for full day kindergarten in 1998, parents on Ponderosa shared national studies with the school committee stating students who receive more early education perform better in school. When considering full day kindergarten in Grayling in 2001, the proposal was a collaborative effort between the school committee, staff and the School Readiness Committee. At another school committee meeting, a representative from the Early Childhood Curriculum Committee shared research that students in longer school days achieve better in reading, demonstrate more independent reading, have more opportunities for learning activities and are less stressed. In 2005, Grayling’s Superintendent Leary and staff spoke to the school committee about the research demonstrating positive effects of full day kindergarten. A kindergarten teacher from Ponderosa Public School district reported to the school committee in 2009 about best practices in kindergarten. The reported philosophy is learning needs to be initiated by students rather than the teachers. An editorial in the Cape Cod Times on April 3, 2013 wrote research showed regardless of socioeconomic background, students who were read to by their parents in their early school years scored better in reading as fifteen year olds. Table 5.1 summarizes the conclusions and evidence for the research questions.
### Table 5.1 Summary of Research Questions, Conclusions, Evidence

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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How have attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students changed over time?</td>
<td>*Nonacademic curriculum to academic curriculum</td>
<td>*Change in hours, report cards and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Child-centered instruction to skill based instruction</td>
<td>*Play and socialization with no academics to skill based academic curriculum with focus on discrete skills in reading and math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Kindergarten no longer treated as unique learning environment different than elementary grades</td>
<td>*Comments about progressing to the student’s needs to preparing the kindergarten student for first grade and need for accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have political and social influences impacted attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in the kindergarten classroom?</td>
<td>*Federal and state laws</td>
<td>*Funding decisions, length and number of kindergarten days, entrance age of kindergarten students, standardized testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Local politics</td>
<td>*Implementation of kindergarten in Fall River, start of free kindergartens in Fall River and Nantucket, implementation of full day kindergarten Falmouth and Nantucket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Parents/public</td>
<td>*Changes after petitions, speaking out at school committee meetings or with superintendents, Gallup Polls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Implications for Practice

The kindergarten experience is now universally offered in public school systems throughout the United States. While it is not mandatory, it is considered valuable and typical for most students to attend. The historical exploration of the attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students and influences which have impacted those attitudes and beliefs allows educators to better reflect on our current goals, purposes and instructional strategies in kindergarten. The results of this research study will be shared with the East Haven Public School District, the Grayling Public School District and the Ponderosa Public School District. Administrators and teachers will be encouraged to examine the current kindergarten
experience provided by their district and have discussions about its alignment with current best practices.

Airasian (1988) states the likely effects of educational innovations are rarely established before they are adopted. Educational research did not seem to play a role in academic changes over the years in kindergarten. Numerous research studies conducted by early childhood educators, pediatricians and neuroscientists supported developmentally appropriate curriculums. However all three districts now have skill based curriculums. Research on the importance of a skill based curriculum was not found. Research tended to focus on how to best achieve the goals of a skill based curriculum or how to blend it with a child centered philosophy. Multiple research studies determined that high-stakes testing at best does not improve student learning or has had a negative effect on students, teachers, instruction and learning. Educators today are asked to reflect if their practices are based on research or demonstrate best practice. Considering the research and the likelihood that high-stakes testing will remain a priority, districts may wish to consider the best way to successfully balance the current demand for increased academics with a developmental philosophy.

Data from the research study also suggests that changes in kindergarten have been greatly impacted by political, media, social and financial influences. Of note was the premise that the media influences our head of government, the president. The data appeared to show school districts repeatedly responding to political and social attitudes rather than promoting themselves as the experts in the field. Government legislation seemed especially influential especially due to funding. The development of kindergarten and/or the expansion of kindergarten was frequently delayed due to funding concerns. Since politicians, parents and the general public influence the kindergarten experience, educators may want to explore better ways to promote
their expertise on how young children learn best, educational success in their districts, current research and best practices and have explicit conversations about the goals and purposes for kindergarten.

Districts may also wish to contemplate their record keeping methods, the purpose of the record keeping and ease of access. All three districts recorded different types of information in their educational records. Some school committee meeting notes were extensive but very business-like with no documentation of any educationally based discussions at all. Other meeting notes were very thorough in recording discussions regarding the pros and cons of proposed changes. Required records were kept in all three districts but were not equally accessible. School committee meeting notes were housed in different spaces (a superintendent’s office, in a boiler room in an old basement and in a vault which was inaccessible). Less formal records such as memos, e-mails and informational files seemed to be thrown away when they appeared to no longer be needed at both the local and the state level. The retention and storage of consistent school records could assist in future historical research studies.

Implications for Research

Historical research proved to be much more challenging than this researcher first anticipated. However, valuable information can be gained by researching the past in order to address current educational problems. There are several implications for future research.

The current educational research about teacher-directed instruction versus child-centered instruction has not directly compared the two methods. While it may be difficult to find a play based kindergarten curriculum in today’s public schools, some private kindergartens still utilize play based curriculums. Researchers could compare long term academic, social and emotional
growth or any negative consequences between students who participated in the two types of curriculum. It would be especially valuable to do longitudinal studies. Are there long term benefits to learning skills earlier? Just because students can do it may not mean we should do it? What happens long term versus how did they do on a recent standardized test?

There are only so many hours in the school day. Some research suggests the current focus on reading has detracted from kindergarten students learning self-regulation skills and increased student anxiety (Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Elkind, 1987; Miller & Almon, 2009; Wenner, 2009). Each time a subject or skill is emphasized in school, another subject or skill is deemphasized or no longer taught. Researchers could study what subjects or skills have been eliminated and the unintended consequences that has on students.

This research study suggested government policies, legislation and funding significantly impact education. Researchers could illustrate how strongly the flow of government money influences education both through funding such as awarding grants and by withholding funds via state and federal qualification requirements. Are financial mandates dictated by best practices? Or do legislators holding the purse strings determine educational policies?

Finally educators use to be held in high esteem. Shortly after the Nation at Risk report was published, the 24th Annual Gallup poll (Elam, 1992 ) ratings reached a low point. Elam (1992) interpreted these results to mean the public saw a failure in educational leadership. The public and politicians have called for increasing accountability in the profession. Little evidence was found that educators are called upon to present or promote how students learn best. Researchers may want to study the most effective ways of promoting current educational
research and best practices with politicians, parents and the general public. Table 5.2 summarizes the implications for practice and research.

**Table 5.2: Summary of Implications for Practice and Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
<th>Implications for Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine kindergarten experiences and have discussions about alignment with current best practices</td>
<td>Study long term academic, social and emotional growth or any negative consequences between students receiving teacher-directed instruction versus child-centered instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider the best way to balance the current demand for increased academics with a developmental philosophy</td>
<td>Study what subjects or skills have been eliminated with the current focus on reading and any unintended consequences this has on kindergarten students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore better ways for educators to promote their expertise on how young children learn best, educational success in their districts, current research, best practices and have explicit conversations about the goals and purposes for kindergarten</td>
<td>Study how strongly the flow of government money influences education both through funding such as awarding grants and by withholding funds via state and federal qualification requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider the rules around the retention and storage of consistent school records</td>
<td>Study the most effective ways of promoting current educational research and best practices with politicians, parents and the general public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

The research showed kindergarten, its goals and the attitudes and beliefs about it have changed significantly over time. Kindergarten began as a half day program with a developmental, play based curriculum where child-centered instruction was promoted. This developmentally appropriate practice emphasized optimal learning takes place when there are positive adult and peer relationships, learning occurs in a variety of social and cultural context and play is emphasized as an important learning vehicle. It was understood that children’s learning rates vary. Today kindergarten enrollment is almost universal in the United States. It has longer hours, more academics and structure and emphasizes the importance of reading. The
skill based curriculum includes comprehensive and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, word identification skills and comprehension. All students are expected to master the same curriculum. While all three districts followed different time lines, they did demonstrate the same patterns of change.

The data from the research study shows there continues to be competing attitudes and beliefs toward teaching and learning for kindergarten students today. High stakes testing and public pressure for accountability support the earlier acquisition of discrete skills through formal structured lessons. Developmental theorists and advocates promote the importance of developmentally appropriate kindergarten by educating the whole child by promoting learning through play and socialization. Attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning in kindergarten seem to have been influenced more by political, media, social and funding influences than by educational research. The government’s call for accountability and high-stakes testing may have resulted in negative unintended consequences.

Goodson (1985) identified the main purpose of studying history as addressing current educational problems. The goals and attitudes about kindergarten teaching and learning have changed. By considering the results and implications of this study, stakeholders can optimize the chances for successful learning for kindergarten students.
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Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes. (1990, September 12).
Grayling School Committee Meeting Notes. (1990, September 25).
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