



Why can't we afford mandatory kindergarten?

FAMILY/KIDS, MONEY

Apr 30, 2017

By [Brette Sember](#)

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BRIEF

Did you attend kindergarten? Most Americans do, but you might be surprised to learn that kindergarten is not mandatory in most US states.

Where is it mandatory?

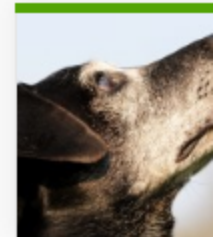
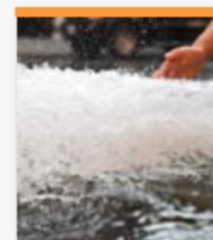
Compulsory education in America is governed by state laws—there is no federal law that sets required school attendance. Kindergarten is required in only 15 states: Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, as well as in the District of Columbia.

In addition, some states that don't mandate kindergarten, including New Jersey and New York, have districts that do. And while kindergarten is mandatory in North Carolina, school principals have the power to skip advanced children right to first grade.

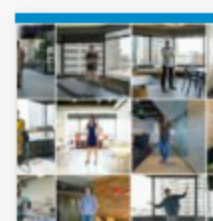
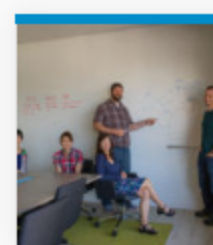
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The benefits of kindergarten

Substantial [research](#) shows that early childhood education improves brain development, increases the chances of succeeding in school, and improves a child's economic future, hence the big push to get kids into pre-kindergarten programs. So it seems odd that kindergarten is not required throughout the United States, especially now that the [Common Core](#) K-12 curriculum has been adopted throughout most of the country.

With the increased student demands imposed by Common Core, many education experts say that kindergarten is now what first grade used to be, and is now a vital initial step in adjusting to school routines and expectations.

Money talks

In [some school districts](#) where kindergarten is not mandated, parents have to pay for it. In fact, [funding](#) is usually the biggest stumbling block to compulsory kindergarten. School budgets are already stretched thin to cover the teacher salaries, classroom space, and educational materials to teach students in grades 1 through 12. Many school districts have little or no room to pay for a non-mandated program like kindergarten.

This funding problem even plagues districts where kindergarten is compulsory, but only as a half-day program. To mandate full-day kindergarten, which [many educators say is essential](#), states would have to set required attendance hours (which again would mean more teachers would be needed). But the funding for that is a long way off in most places at this point.

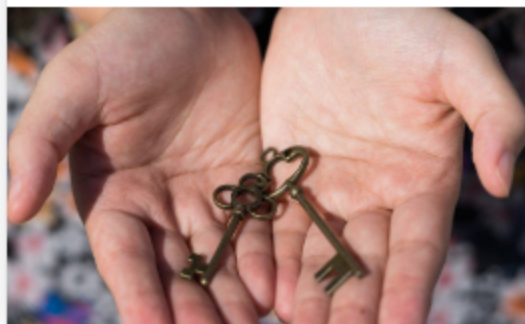
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About Brette Sember



[Brette Sember](#) is a former attorney and author of more than 40 books, including *The Divorce Organizer & Planner*, *The Complete Divorce*, *How to Parent with Your Ex*, *The Essential Supervisor's Handbook*, *The Complete Credit Repair Kit*, *The Original Muffin Tin Cookbook*, and *The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel*. She writes often about law, parenting, food, travel, health, and more. She blogs at PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com.

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