Full-day kindergarten is a great idea but the state of Ohio has to help pay for it -- editorial

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By The Plain Dealer Editorial Board

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It was hard not to cheer when Gov. Ted Strickland announced in his State of the State address early this year that he would end the "outdated practice of giving our most impressionable students only a half day of learning."

His plan requires all elementary schools to offer full-day kindergarten by next fall.

But now, reality has set in, in a state still struggling to close an $851 million budget gap.

Hundreds of school district officials say they will seek one-year waivers from the Ohio Department of Education because the state isn't chipping in enough to help them run a full day of kindergarten as the law requires. They make a good point.

Ohio Superintendent Deborah Delisle, who will determine criteria for waivers, should be more than generous.

Kindergarten is a critical foundation of the education system. However, small school districts battered by this cash-strapped economy (Cleveland and other large Ohio districts already have full-day classes) simply don't have the money to hire new teachers and expand their facilities to make room for additional kindergarten classes.

Ohio must not give up on the idea of providing full-day kindergarten for every youngster. It is too important, particularly for impoverished youngsters who need more academic face time and who should be the top priority in any funding that is forthcoming.

But until Ohio can help pay for this expensive mandate, many schools will need the waiver.

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