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## Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?

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Recent accounts suggest that accountability pressures have trickled down into the early elementary grades and that kindergarten today is characterized by a heightened focus on academic skills and a reduction in opportunities for play. This paper compares kindergarten classrooms between 1998 and 2010 using two large nationally-representative datasets. We show substantial changes in each of the five dimensions considered: kindergarten teachers' beliefs about school readiness, time spent on academic and non-academic content, classroom organization, pedagogical approach, and use of standardized assessments. Kindergarten teachers in the later period held far higher academic expectations for children both prior to kindergarten entry and during the kindergarten year. They devote more time to advanced literacy and math content, teacher-directed instruction and assessment, and substantially less time to art, music, science and child-selected activities. Changes were most pronounced for schools serving high proportions of low-income and non-white children.

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