

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION & CARE

From the People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



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A child's ability to think, form relationships, and live up to his or her full potential is directly related to the synergistic effect of good health, good nutrition, and appropriate stimulation and interaction with others. The World Bank

Ensuring that children have a solid start in their early years has immediate and long-term benefits for children and society as a whole.¹ But for decades, Ontario has had an “underfunded patchwork”² of services that has left families scrambling to piece together quality early learning and care opportunities for their children.

WITH OUR BEST FUTURE IN MIND: VISION AND POLICY BLUEPRINT

In 2008, Premier Dalton McGuinty asked Dr. Charles Pascal, his Early Learning Advisor, to develop a plan for a seamless and integrated system to support children from birth to age 12 and their families. Dr. Pascal's 2009 report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, is a blueprint for how to organize, manage and deliver services for children, including full-day early learning, integrated before- and after-school programs and child and family centres.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

In response to the Early Learning Advisor's report, the province introduced “the biggest change for Ontario's education system in a generation.”³ The government committed to offering full-day kindergarten in all Ontario schools by 2015.

This year's surveys show improvements related to full-day kindergarten:

- 19% of English-language elementary schools outside of Northern Ontario offer full-day, every day kindergarten programs, an increase from 5% in 2009/10.
- 21% of elementary schools across the province report that child care centres and kindergarten teachers work together to coordinate curriculum, an increase from 15% in 2009/10.
- 52% of elementary schools report they have a system in place between child care and school to keep track of children with special needs, an increase from 35% in 2009/10.

QUICK FACTS FOR 2010/11

- 19% of English-language schools outside of Northern Ontario offer full-day, every day kindergarten programs, compared to 5% last year.
- Across Ontario, 30% of elementary schools have on-site childcare programs for kindergarten-aged children.
- 24% of schools report having a family support program, up from 20% last year.

SEAMLESS DAY: FULL-DAY, FULL-YEAR PROGRAMS FOR 4- AND 5-YEAR-OLDS

With Our Best Future in Mind recommended that parents have an option beyond full-day kindergarten: a seamless full-day, full-year program for their children. This was not intended to be an add-on to kindergarten, but a cohesive part of the Early Learning Program that extended before and after the traditional school day and year.

Last year, the *Education Act* was changed to require boards with full-day kindergarten to offer fee-based extended day programs to four- and five-year-olds, but only during the school year.⁴ Only a few parents registered for the programs because of concerns about uncertain cost, quality and availability.⁵ As a result, only seven English boards operate integrated programs.⁶ Even in those boards, the programs operate only in a limited number of schools: for example, the Ottawa-Carleton DSB has a well-regarded program,⁷ but the program is only offered in four of its schools.

The province has recently passed legislation that threatens the “seamlessness” of the program. The legislation will allow boards to contract out before- and after-school care,⁸ and school boards, unions and early childhood experts are particularly concerned that for-profit providers are permitted under the new changes. Across Ontario, 30% of elementary schools have on-site child care programs for kindergarten-aged children.⁹

BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR 6-TO-12-YEAR-OLDS

According to Active Healthy Kids Canada, nearly three-quarters of Canadian children do not have access to supervised after-school programs.¹⁰ The Early Learning Advisor's report recommended that if enough parents requested them, boards would be required to offer fee-based before- and after-school programs for 6-to-12-year-olds.

This year, 42% of elementary schools have before- and after-school programs, an improvement from 37% last year, but, despite the Advisor's recommendation, school boards are not required to offer them.

CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

Finally, *With Our Best Future in Mind* recommended the development of an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres organized by municipalities. Centres would provide families with a full range of services for very young children, including childcare; pre- and post-natal care; family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups; early identification and intervention resources; and links to special needs treatment and community resources. These centres would incorporate the current array of family support programs, including Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Best Start Programs and Early Years Centres.

This year, 24% of elementary schools report they have some form of family support program, up from 20% last year.

CHALLENGES FOR BOARDS AND CHILD CARE SECTOR

The rollout of the new policy has not been without difficulties. School boards have raised concerns that the province has not provided sufficient funding or support for full-day kindergarten or for before- and after-school programs. In addition, because the full-day kindergarten program was introduced without recommended changes to provincial child care policy and funding, it may jeopardize the already struggling child care sector:

- Childcare centres will lose a significant number of 4- and 5-year olds to the full-day kindergarten programs, and their fees often help to cover the costs of the more expensive care of younger children.¹¹
- Early childhood educators may leave daycares to seek better-paying, more secure jobs within the school system.¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing children with the supports and enrichment they need when they are very young has a positive impact throughout their lives—on their health, well-being, learning and their capacity to become contributing adults.

People for Education recommends

- the province enact regulations so that only school boards, municipalities and not-for-profit agencies are permitted to operate extended day programs in schools,
- the province mandate, with appropriate funding and support, that school boards offer extended day programs for children from 4 to 12 years of age,
- the province develop policy and funding to ensure municipal and not-for-profit operators have access to space in schools, at cost, for full-year, extended day programs for 4- and 5-year-olds,
- the province mandate boards to establish collaborative policies and practices, including joint professional development for teachers and early childhood educators, so that extended programs are truly seamless, and
- the province work with other levels of government to provide support to the child care sector to offset revenue losses associated with full-day kindergarden.

WHAT PRINCIPALS TOLD US . . .

The kindergarten teacher and the child care workers are in constant communication in regards to shared students.

Elementary School Toronto DSB

The local child care centre received a grant for healthy living, and we have been participating in some of their programs.

Elementary School DSB Ontario North East

Full day kindergarten—concerns around classrooms that were not designed for upwards of 30 children, including activity centers, etc. The rooms are not very comfortable. Also, there should be a cap on these classes of 20. We are finding that if a student is having a difficult time, the ECE works with that student, which leaves the teacher working with 27-28 students on her own.

Elementary School Toronto DSB

The FDKP has been a tremendous success for the students and teachers. We have been wonderfully surprised at how well the integration of the JK and SK students has worked. The emergent curriculum has allowed the students to direct the learning, and they have shown us their tremendous capability to go further than we very expected. We are extremely excited as we learn to facilitate their learning.

Elementary School DSB Ontario North East

NOTES

- 1 See e.g. Schweinhart, L. (2004). *The HighScope Perry Preschool Study through age 40: Summary, conclusions and frequently asked questions*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.
- 2 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2006). *Early childhood education and care policy: Country note - Canada*. Paris, France: OECD Directorate for Education.
- 3 Rushowy, K. (2010, September 7). Full-day kindergarten starts, but parents have questions. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/education/backtoschool/article/857414--full-day-kindergarten-starts-but-parents-have-questions>
- 4 An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters, S.O. 2010, c.10 and see O.Reg. 225/10.
- 5 Rushowy, K. (2010, June 9). Little demand for after-school care for full-day kindergarten. *The Star* (Toronto). Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/mobile/living/article/820737>
- 6 CDSB of Eastern Ontario, Halton CDSB, Ottawa Carleton DSB, Ottawa CDSB, Rainbow DSB, Simcoe County DSB, Waterloo Region DSB, CÉP de l'Est de l'Ontario, CSDC du Centre-Est de l'Ontario, CSDC du Nouvel-Ontario and CSD du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. See Government of Ontario. (2011). What happens before and after school. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childergarten/whathappensbeforeandafterschool.html#listofboard>
- 7 Atkinson Early Years Task Force. (2011). Extended day program brief. On file with author.
- 8 See *Better Future for Ontario Act (Budget Measures)* 2011, S.O.2011, c.9, Sch. 10, and proposed O.Reg. 500/00.
- 9 See submissions on Government Bill 173 from Ontario Public School Boards Association, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Atkinson Centre on Child Development at <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/Main/index.html>
- 10 Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2011). *Don't let this be the most activity our kids get after school: Active Healthy Kids report card*. Toronto, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.active-healthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/ReportCard2011/AHKCRptCard20110429FINAL.pdf>, page 10.
- 11 See e.g. estimates that fees for childcare would rise an average of 25% to offset revenue lost. Quality Early Childhood Network. (2008). *The implications of full-day early learning: Moving forward*. Toronto, ON: Author. Retrieved from http://www.mothercraft.ca/resource-library/publications/Full_Day_Early_Learning_OECN_Nov_2008.pdf
- 12 Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare and Canadian Union for Public Employees. (2010, October 27). Workforce shortages threaten full-day early learning and care [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/Workforce-Shortages-Threaten-Child-Care-Full-Day-Early-Learning-Care-Not-Enough-Early-1342259.htm>



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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To read the full 2011 report, go to <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Annual-Report-on-Ontario-Schools-2011.pdf>