

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Every year, People for Education conducts a survey of Ontario's 4900 publicly funded schools.

The survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2013, 1122 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the 2013 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN

Investing in a public system of early childhood education and care is not just beneficial for children, but it has long-lasting social and economic benefits as well.¹

Ontario is the only province so far that is planning to provide full-day kindergarten (FDK) for all four- and five-year-old children. Studies of the program are already showing FDK has a positive impact on children's early learning and social skills, particularly for English Language Learners.²

By the fall of 2012, approximately 49% of children had access to FDK, where teachers and early childhood educators work together to deliver a full day of play-based learning.

Some have balked at the cost of the program, which Don Drummond estimated would reach \$1.5 billion per year when it is at capacity.³ However, cost benefit analyses suggest that the economic gains—quite apart from the benefits to children—will outweigh the costs.⁴

But there have been challenges implementing FDK, including the cost of renovations, some very large classes, increased sharing of space, and adjustments to on-site childcare programs.⁵

The program is on track to be rolled-out in all publicly funded schools by September 2014.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE EXTENDED DAY?

The original vision for early years in Ontario, as laid out in 2009 in the report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, was that, in addition to full-day kindergarten, families would have access to 'dawn to dusk' extended-day programs for children, delivered on school sites by school boards or licensed childcare providers.⁶

QUICK FACTS FOR 2013

- 38% of schools with full-day kindergarten (FDK) have both before- and after-school care.
- 18% of schools with FDK have year-round childcare programs.
- 43% of elementary schools report that they have had requests for childcare from parents.
- 44% of schools have both before- and after-school programs for children in grades 1-6.

That goal is far from being achieved.

In 2013, in schools with kindergarten:

- 35% have childcare for children under four years old;
- 55% have childcare and/or extended day programs for kindergarten-aged children;
- only 38% have both before- and after-school care;
- 21% of the programs for kindergarten-aged children operate year-round; and
- approximately two-thirds have subsidies available for childcare.

Although extended day and extended-year services were intended to be integrated into the province's full-day kindergarten policy,⁷ schools offering full-day kindergarten are no more likely to offer both before- and after-school care (38%), and are less likely to offer year-round programs (18%).

PROGRAMS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

There are also limited school-based options for older children.

- 62% of elementary schools have on-site care (only 44% have care both before- and after-school) for children in grades 1-6.
- 23% of schools have full-year programs for children in grades 1-6.

Some principals suggest that the main reason schools do not offer extended hours childcare is because there is little interest from parents. But 43% of schools report that they have had requests for childcare from parents.

INTEGRATED SERVICES

In early 2013, the province launched plans for full integration of early learning and care programs for children from birth to 5 years.

The *Early Years Policy Framework* sets out a number of priority areas, though no extra funding:

- Responsibility for childcare will be moved to the Ministry of Education, and childcare policy will be substantially revised.
- The roll-out of full-day kindergarten will be completed.
- Speech and language services will be improved.
- All family support programs will be integrated under a single Best Start Child and Family Centre framework.⁸

The needs in our school are huge! Children come into school unable to talk and often have not been toilet trained. We have 66 kindergarten students in 2 classes as we are full-day, and have 2 teachers and 2 ECEs. There is a misconception out there by the Ministry that this is ok. It is not. That many 3, 4, and 5 year olds in a room makes for chaos when students have no self-regulation skills. The quality of learning has gone down. Inquiry and the Early Learning Program is wonderful, but staff are finding it difficult to carry out with the numbers of students and the needs in our community! HELP!

Principal, Elementary School, Lakehead DSB

RECOMMENDATIONS

High-quality, accessible and affordable care and education is a long-term investment in the healthy development of children and a strong society.

People for Education recommends that:

- the province stay the course in implementing full day kindergarten for all four- and five-year-olds;
- the province mandate, with appropriate funding and support, that school boards offer extended-day programs for children from 4 to 12 years old;
- school boards, with support from the province, develop policy to ensure access to school facilities, at cost, for full-year and extended day programs operated by school boards, municipalities or not-for-profits;
- the province continue to work on integrating childcare, education, and children's services (such as speech and language or children's mental health) to promote a child-focused system that helps children thrive and be ready to learn; and
- the province work with other levels of government to provide support to the childcare sector, to help them offset revenue losses associated with full-day kindergarten and improve the quality and affordability of childcare.

REPORT SAYS ONTARIO EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS FAIL TO MEASURE UP

With more than three-quarters of mothers in the workforce, high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare is needed for most children in Ontario, not only a few.

Despite recent advances, Ontario, along with most Canadian provinces, received a failing grade on the Early Childhood Education Index, released as part of the *Early Years Study 3*.⁹ This reflects Canada's poor record (by international standards) on early childhood provision.¹⁰

The index emphasizes that full-day kindergarten alone is not enough for the youngest children in the school system, or their families. In particular, concerns were raised about destabilization in the broader childcare sector and a lack of availability of before- and after-school care for children in grades 1-6.

NOTES

- 1 TD Economics. (2012) Early childhood education has long-lasting and widespread benefits. Toronto: Toronto Dominion Bank. http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112_EarlyChildhoodEducation.pdf
- 2 Pelletier, J., & Corter, C. (2013, May). *Leveling the playing field through an innovation in full-day kindergarten*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, CA. On file with People for Education.
- 3 Commission on the reform of Ontario's public services. (2012) Report. Toronto: Government of Ontario, retrieved May 3, 2013 from <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/reformcommission/chapters/ch6.html#ch6-e>.
- 4 See e.g., R. Fairholm. (2010) Early learning and care impact analysis. Toronto: Centre for Spatial Economics, Retrieved May 3, 2013 from www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/Events/2010_Events/Cost-Benefits_of_Ontario_s_Early_Learning_Program.html.
- 5 Comments of principals on file with People for Education, and see e.g. Editorial, Feb. 24, 2013, Toronto Star, "Ontario needs to fix the full-day kindergarten problem it created." http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2013/02/24/ontario_needs_to_fix_the_fullday_kindergarten_problem_it_created_editorial.html
- 6 Pascal, C. E. (2009). With our best future in mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario (pp. 64). Toronto: Government of Ontario. <http://www.oeyc.ca/pdf%20files/Charles%20Pascal%20Report.pdf>
- 7 Ibid., p.5.
- 8 Ministry of Education (2013). Ontario Early Years Policy Framework. Toronto: Government of Ontario. Retrieved May 8, 2013, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/OntarioEarlyYear.pdf>
- 9 M.N. McCain, F. Mustard, K. McQuaig. (2011) Early Years Study 3. Toronto: Early Years Foundation. Retrieved May 3, 2013 from <http://earlyyearsstudy.ca/>.
- 10 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. (2013). Report card 11: Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview (pp. 60). Rome: UNICEF. Retrieved May 8, 2013, from www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/imce_uploads/DISCOVER/OUR%20WORK/ADVOCACY/DOMESTIC/POLICY%20ADVOCACY/DOCS/unicef_report_card_11.pdf.