

Children's Ombudsman proposes early childhood education as constitutional right ^[1]

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Excerpts

Ombudsman for Children Tuomas Kurttila proposed on Tuesday that Finland's Constitution should be amended to guarantee children the subjective right to early childhood education.

Children's Ombudsman Tuomas Kurttila has made a public appeal to amend Finland's Constitution in order to provide all children with a subjective right to early childhood education. He says this is because clear differences have now arisen in municipalities throughout the country in terms of how the services are provided.

In 2015 the Finnish Parliament passed legislation to limit the subjective right to day care. Some municipalities have followed suit, but dozens of others – including large cities like Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere and Turku – have refused to implement it.

Kurttila says the varied municipal reaction has created inequalities in how the vital services are provided.

As a solution, Kurttila proposes that the Constitution would be amended to include a statute that would guarantee the subjective right of under school age children to pedagogic early childhood education.

Kurttila likens the situation to comprehensive education. The Finnish Constitution currently provides everyone with basic education free of charge. He says now it the time to sit down and think about making early childhood education free in Finland, and for which groups of children.

A pre-emptive solution

Decades of studies have shown that early childhood education is critical for preparing children for the classroom. Several international studies have found that participation has improved graduation rates and test performance, while reducing grade repetition and the number of children in special education.

By providing education in a child's most formative years, early childhood education also has also been shown to close the educational achievement gap that might exist between students from different income brackets before formal schooling begins.

In addition, a correlation has been found between pedagogic early childhood education and fewer problems as adults in the areas of mental health and self-sufficiency.

The Children's Ombudsman presented his proposal on Tuesday at a seminar on education equity in Lahti.

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