

Full-day kindergarten works, and should be extended across the country: Editorial ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Back in 2010 Ontario's Liberal government began a bold experiment. It launched a plan to bring in full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds over the next five years.

At the time, the \$1.5-billion plan was dismissed by then-Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak as a "frill" or "shiny new car" that Ontarians could not afford.

Now the results of a new study by researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) provide strong evidence that the experiment is paying off in spades.

The research, which tracked almost 600 children, should point the way for other provinces and territories to follow Ontario's lead, for academic, social and economic reasons.

Of course, that will take some political investment. Currently only six provinces and the Northwest Territories offer full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds. The others have only half-day kindergarten. And only Ontario provides it for four-year-olds, though the Northwest Territories and Nova Scotia have plans to introduce it.

Still, the OISE study shows that the benefits of two-year, full-day kindergarten are well-worth the initial investment. Here's why:

First, it found children in the two-year, full-day learning program scored higher on reading, writing and number knowledge than those in a half-day program, and remained ahead until the end of Grade 2.

Second, the children also scored higher on self-regulation. That means they are better prepared to respond "to life's stresses and return to a calm and alert state," one of the researchers, Janette Pelletier, writes in an article on the research. This is an especially important skill for children, she says. "Existing research shows that self-control, an aspect of self-regulation, predicts long-term health, wealth and even a reduction in crime."

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