

# Students in poorer neighbourhoods may miss out on 'vital programs,' report says <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The number of Ontario schools offering before- and after-school care has jumped dramatically in the last six years — but families in the poorest neighbourhoods are less likely to benefit, a new report shows.

While school boards must provide child care for elementary students where there is a demand, "there may not be equitable access to these vital programs across the province," People for Education says in its annual report released Monday.

"In 2018, schools with low parental education, and those with high levels of poverty, are less likely to have child care."

The findings, based on a survey of 1,244 principals from across the province, came as a surprise, said Annie Kidder, executive director of the research and advocacy group.

Also striking was that child care isn't the only example of how schools with more affluent and educated parent bodies appear to provide more opportunities for students, she said, suggesting parents' "social capital" — their ability to advocate and influence — plays a big role.

"You're more likely to have a music teacher if you have fewer kids under the low-income cutoff, and you're more likely to have child care in the well-off schools," said Kidder. "That should not be the case."

The survey, which used census and Ministry of Education data to examine the relationship between students' family background and school resources, found that elementary schools where parents are better educated and have more money are twice as likely to have a music teacher as schools where parental education is considered low.

It found similar trends for specialist teachers in visual arts and drama.

Promoting equal access to programs for all students has been a longtime focus of People for Education. The group has repeatedly highlighted how parent fundraising, used to pay for everything from guest artistic performers to iPads to air conditioners, is widening the gap between have and have-not schools.

The 2018 report, "The New Basics for Public Education," looks beyond the dollars and explores differences when school communities are better able to navigate the system and fight for what their kids need.

Take child care, for example. Four of every five schools surveyed in 2018 provided it onsite for children in Grades 1 through 6, up sharply from 55 per cent in 2012. Eighty per cent of schools also offered it for kindergarten students, versus fewer than half six years ago.

But not all students benefitted equally. Schools with higher poverty and lower parental education had less before- and after-school care. Roughly 90 per cent of elementary schools with low poverty and a high proportion of parents who graduated from university offered child care but it was only available in two-thirds of schools where parents had less education.

Early learning expert Charles Pascal says the province's policy of encouraging more school-based child care is important. However, the absence of a paid universal program has led to a "remarkably unfair rich-poor divide that must be rectified," says Pascal, professor at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and former adviser to the Liberal government on full-day kindergarten.

Research shows high quality child care boosts children's social, emotional and literacy development as well as longterm learning and success, he says.

It's also one of many programs beyond the classroom basics of reading, writing and math that People for Education argues are key to helping students thrive and equipping them for the future. The report stresses the connection between learning, mental and physical health, special education, the arts and such community supports as parenting classes.

Principals surveyed cited student mental health as a continuing priority and stressed a need for more guidance counsellors, school psychologists, educational assistants and mental health professionals.

Fifty-eight per cent of elementary principals and almost half from high schools said they had recommended that a student with special ed needs not attend school for the full day, primarily for safety reasons.

People for Education started as a group of feisty parents fighting cuts to public education under the 1990s government of Conservative Mike Harris.

Twenty years later, Kidder says she hopes the 2018 report and its holistic approach to education will serve as a blueprint for the new Tory regime under Doug Ford.

While he has promised to dismantle the new health and sex-ed curriculum and focus on back-to-basics math, Kidder says she doesn't expect drastic changes to the system.

**Related link:** 2018 Annual report on schools: The new basics for public education [3]

**Region:** Ontario [4]

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/students-poorer-neighbourhoods-may-miss-out-%E2%80%98vital-programs%E2%80%99-report>

#### Links

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