

Axing Ontario's full-day kindergarten could hurt children, families: expert ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The future of full-day kindergarten in Ontario is in question.

Premier Doug Ford was vague with reporters on Wednesday when questioned about the future of the program, which was introduced by former Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty, and fully implemented in 2014.

"I can tell you that there's going to be all-day kindergarten next year and we'll sit down and you'll hear from us in the future," he said, adding that any decision made will only improve things, and not make them worse.

Although full-day kindergarten saves families thousands of dollars a year, it is said to cost the government \$1.5 billion annually.

According to analysts, the full-day program is a genuine benefit to children's development.

Research conducted by the Ministry of Education shows that full-day kindergarten lowers risks in language and cognitive development and leads to stronger academic performance in Grade 1. Additional research from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education reports that children who had attended full-day kindergarten did better on reading, writing and number knowledge, and were better able to self-regulate, or manage stress.

Some parents took to Twitter to express their concern – and support – of the potential change.

Don Giesbrecht, CEO with the Canadian Childcare Federation, says the initial decision to introduce full-day kindergarten wasn't a plan that came about lightly.

"It was done after broad consultation, lots of evidence-based research on how young children grow and develop, and is part of a much broader plan...in regards to the earlier years," he tells Yahoo Canada.

Giesbrecht says to dismiss the program that's currently in place would also mean disregarding the science behind early childhood development and the substantial amount of consultation, process and consideration that went into making the decision.

Ontario and Quebec, which has subsidized daycare, are often considered to be the leaders in child care in Canada, Giesbrecht says, based on systems that start at birth.

"Ontario has really been very progressive and for a lot of people outside of the province, it's very much looked at as, 'okay, we need to learn what's going on in that province,'" he says.

Giesbrecht questions how the different educational systems in the provinces will adapt to such a significant change.

"The school system, the child care system...they will not be ready for this," says Giesbrecht. "It's a serious discussion. To just say 'we promised to save money' is really short-sighted. When you start to move back on that, it has ripple effects."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: kindergarten ^[4]

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