

Full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten programs coming to Saskatoon schools ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Starting September some young children in Saskatoon will get an extra boost to their learning.

Saskatoon Public Schools will offer full-day prekindergarten classes at 13 of their schools Mondays through Thursdays. 14 elementary schools will run full-day kindergarten classes five days a week.

"Increasing the amount of time that we're able to work with these three-, four- and five-year-olds, I think, is going to be just a gift to them," said Trish Reeve, a superintendent of education for Saskatoon Public Schools (SPS).

"We want children to be outdoors. We want children to be exploring. We want children to be playing."

Funding for extension of programs

Earlier this month, Saskatchewan's auditor reported the need for improvements when it comes to helping preschool-aged and kindergarten-aged children develop academically.

While the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education provides funding for half-day prekindergarten programs, the donations to expand to full-day classes come from the Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation's Early Learning Equal Start initiative, Reeve says.

"We're really excited about the opportunity to provide these experiences for a number of families that typically wouldn't have that opportunity based on the funding from the ministry alone."

Goal: Achieve Grade 3-level reading by Grade 3

Full-day prekindergarten programs are not completely new to public schools in Saskatoon. Five of SPS's schools have already offered full-day pre-K and kindergarten classes this school year, Reeve says.

"We have just seen the data that we have collected from September to June, and we are able to see growth [in the children's skills]," she said.

"That's exciting in a pandemic year, where it's been a very unique learning opportunity."

According to the SPS website, pre-kindergarten programs are offered to three- and four-year-old children who might benefit from extra support, including language and communication skills.

The full-day, every-day kindergarten programs aim to increase the childrens' understanding of letters, numbers and writing skills, the SPS website says.

One of the goals of the early learning programs is to support young students to achieve Grade 3-level reading by Grade 3.

"If students are not reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3, it does have impact on them socially, emotionally, as they move into middle years, high school and adulthood," Reeve said.

"The research is pretty profound and lengthy in terms of knowing that if children are successful and are literate by the end of Grade 3, their world is open to them."

Full-day and half-day prekindergarten programs

In the past SPS had received funding to run 40 half-time prekindergarten programs in Saskatoon. With only 13 switching to full-day classes, the other 27 will remain half-day options.

"For some families, that works for them, that's what they want — just to get that exposure, getting a child started, you know, as a three-year-old, getting into the education system and having an opportunity to learn with others."

Schools offering both full-day prekindergarten and kindergarten classes are Caroline Robins, Caswell, Fairhaven, Howard Coad, King George, Lester B. Pearson, Mayfair, Pleasant Hill, Princess Alexandra, Sutherland, Vincent Massey, wâhkôhtowin (formerly Confederation Park), and W.P. Bate schools.

Priority is given to students living within the school catchment area.

Additionally, North Park Wilson School will run a full-day kindergarten program, and Westmount Community School will offer a full-day prekindergarten class.

Parents interested in registering their children for the programs need to contact the individual schools.

Region: Saskatchewan [3]

Tags: full day early learning [4]

full day kindergarten [5]

school age child care [6]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9129> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9127>