

TDSB chair concerned about 'extraordinary developmental needs' of incoming Kindergarteners due to COVID isolation ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The chair of the Toronto District School Board is expressing concerns about the “extraordinary developmental needs” of incoming Kindergarten students who he says will have spent “the vast majority of their existence living through the COVID-19 pandemic” by the time classes start in the fall.

TDSB Chair Alexander Brown wrote an open letter to Education Minister Stephen Lecce outlining the potential challenges on Wednesday.

He is asking the ministry to amend its policies so that an early childhood educator is assigned to work in tandem with a teacher in each Kindergarten classroom and not just those with at least 15 students, as currently required.

“New students entering Junior Kindergarten in the 2022-23 school year will have spent the vast majority of their existence living through the COVID-19 pandemic. Early childhood development depends on experience, and particularly social experience, which stimulates, tunes and hones the brain’s unfolding architecture. Because of the pandemic, opportunities for social experience have been limited due to closed childcare services, community centres, playgrounds, social distancing and other factors,” he said. “Therefore, I am seeking assistance from your government to help these new students develop a strong foundation for learning in Grade 1 by providing an early childhood educator in every Kindergarten classroom.”

In order to begin Junior Kindergarten in the fall students have to be four or turning four sometime in 2022.

But in the case of children born later in the year that could mean that they have spent most of their lives living with COVID-19 restrictions, including the closure of childcare centres during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020.

In his letter Brown conceded that there has been minimal research into the development challenges faced by children born during or immediately prior to the pandemic.

However, he said that at least one U.S. study has pointed to “slight neurodevelopmental delays.”

Lecce has not formally replied to Brown so far but in a statement provided to CP24 on Thursday afternoon a spokesperson for the education minister noted that there is nothing in the Education Act that would prevent individual boards, like the TDSB, from choosing to deploy early childhood educators in all Kindergarten classrooms regardless of class sizes.

The spokesperson also said that the Ontario government is providing boards with \$304 million in additional funding for staffing supports as part of its COVID-19 Learning Recovery Fund.

They said that the TDSB “can use their portion as they see fit to best support students.”

“Under Premier Ford, Ontario is investing over \$680 million more next year – the single largest investment in Ontario’s history, that will deliver the largest tutoring, mental health, special education and staffing supports in all public schools across the province,” the statement reads.

The ministry has previously said that ECE’s “bring a focus on age-appropriate program planning” into its Kindergarten classrooms. They say that, in turn, “promotes each child’s physical, cognitive, language, emotional, social and creative development and well-being.”

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

COVID-19 ^[4]

children's health ^[5]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/tdsb-chair-concerned-about-extraordinary-developmental-needs> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/kindergarten> [4]

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