

'Lots of ifs' in program to get kids into kindergarten earlier [CA-BC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

If B.C. moves forward with plans for full-day kindergarten for kids as young as three, it could provide "huge opportunities" for early learning, but it must be done right, says Sheila Davidson.

Davidson is the executive director of the Early Childhood Educators of B.C, a professional organization dedicated to ensuring that B.C. has the highest quality of child care available to children and families in the province.

She said there are a "lot of ifs" to the concept of beginning formal education at such a tender age, and any kindergarten program the Ministry of Education would develop for toddlers must be different from current models.

"Having kids at that age sitting at desks would not be an optimum learning environment for them," she said.

"Children at that age learn more through play so if quality programs are established with adequate resources in recognition of that, and administered by qualified early education teachers, it would make a big difference in the education of our children."

The ministry is considering full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds by 2009, as well as day-long kindergarten for four-year-olds by 2010 and for three-year-olds by 2012 in response to studies that suggest children three to five years old are at an ideal age to learn.

The B.C. government established the Early Childhood Learning Agency in the speech from the throne in February and gave it the task of exploring the feasibility of expanding early learning programs in British Columbia. It will report back by the end of 2008.

As part of this work, the ECLA has sent a consultation paper to the province's school districts asking for input by July 18 on the feasibility of full-time kindergarten for three-to five-year-olds.

Davidson said other jurisdictions, such as New Zealand, France and Italy have already established early education programs for their children and B.C.'s current model of beginning children in school at five is "an antiquated system."

"The early literacy programs that are now offered in B.C. don't provide a holistic approach to early education, and research doesn't bear out the belief that children at that age are better served by staying at home " she said.

Davidson suggested if the ministry decides to bring three- and four-year-olds into the public education system, a post-secondary degree program should be established for early educators.

Early educators are now required to have at least completed a one year program.

"Whatever the expense of introducing early education, it would be worth the investment if done right and would pay off tenfold for these students," Davidson said.

- reprinted from the Nanaimo Daily News

Region: British Columbia^[2]

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