

# The ABCs of all-day kindergarten [CA-ON]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

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He's [Charles Pascal] the guy fingered by Premier McGuinty to put some flesh on the Liberal government's anemic campaign promise to establish all-day kindergarten in Ontario. All we found out when Mr. Pascal's two-year appointment was announced in November was that it would be offered to four- and five-year-olds starting in 2010 and that it would likely cost more than the \$200-million the government has budgeted for it.

The Rest is up to him. "Lots of details," he admits.

Mr. Pascal is well qualified for the challenge facing him. He's former deputy minister of education who, as a young professor at McGill University in the early 1970s founded a child-care centre. In addition, as executive director of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, he was a driving force behind a project in Toronto that combines day care and early learning programs at one school. If that's not enough, he hopes that his newest grandchild, born nine weeks ago, will have all-day kindergarten available on his fourth birthday.

Mr. Pascal calls the introduction of all-day kindergarten "transformational," because it marks an extension of the universal-education system begun in Ontario in the 19th century. He believes it will raise literacy rates, improve nutritional standards and provide early detection of children with learning disabilities. All this makes it a powerful anti-poverty measure, he believes.

The prospect of all-day kindergarten is being greeted rapturously by child-care advocates. "It's very exciting," said Andrea Calver, acting executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "The idea of a universal program... is everything we've been calling for."

But Mr. Pascal has much to work through before those blessed days arrive. "This is all about implementation," he said in an interview, noting that governments are often more successful at thinking up policies than they are at putting them into practice.

As he says, it is complex change. He will have to figure out, for example, what sort of "play-based" curriculum to use and what mix of kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators to deploy. He will also need to decide how quickly to phase in the program (at this point, 2013 is the target date), where to find space and how much the whole thing will cost.

Last fall, Mr. Pascal was coy when he was asked whether \$300-million would be enough- "unequivocally, maybe" was his response- but the Premier has hinted that budget won't be sufficient. Indeed, it looks like it will be a way off the mark.

There are perhaps 200,000 four- and five-year-olds in Ontario now. The current take-up of half-day kindergarten is more than 80 per cent. These two figures taken together, combined with the \$5,200 annual base funding provided for elementary students- that's a bargain-basement figure- indicates all-day kindergarten would cost at least \$832-million a year. That's before the cost of constructing new facilities. Thousands of child-care spaces would be freed up but it's not difficult to see the cost creeping toward the \$1.3-billion that Quebec provides service providers for its extensive (although not universal) child-care system.

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So far, the opposition parties at Queen's Park are supporting the concept of all-day kindergarten but it's a moving target that will certainly draw some fire when Mr. Pascal unveils his implementation plan a year from now.

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**Region:** Canada<sup>[2]</sup>

Ontario<sup>[3]</sup>

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curricula and pedagogy<sup>[5]</sup>

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