

Early learning isn't just about the ABCs; 'It's about opportunity and equity,' says new special adviser [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Charles Pascal has seen firsthand through his children and grandchildren the value of early learning.

And it's not all about education.

"It's about opportunity and equity," he said yesterday after Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed him special adviser on full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds.

"It's being able to see my daughter, who lives in a very large home, become friends for life with a girl who lives with a single mom in a very small social housing apartment," Pascal said about the friendship his youngest daughter Tai, now 12, forged at a downtown Toronto child-care centre.

That kind of social and ethnic integration can only happen when child care and education are offered universally to all children, he said.

"The moment you start making the early years expensive, you begin to divide and exclude and make it extremely difficult for those in poverty," he said.

Pascal, 63, is executive director of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and head of the province's Education Quality and Accountability Office, the province's independent testing authority.

He holds a PhD in psychology from Michigan University and has been active in public education and child care in government and academia.

He was deputy minister of education and training as well as community and social services in Bob Rae's NDP government of the 1990s and is a former member of the governing council at the University of Toronto and former executive head of graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

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Pascal's enthusiasm and experience for education and child care has won him supporters in both fields.

"He's probably a perfect fit when it comes to understanding the two issues that he's going to be asked to make a report on," said David Clegg, head of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, which represents 7,000 teachers.

"I think he understands not only the needs that have to be addressed but also the politics around it," he said. "He's been involved with so many people in public education for so long, I think he has the network that will help him succeed where others might not."

Researcher Martha Friendly, the country's national authority on child care, was also effusive in her praise. "Charles not only is extremely committed to this but he also knows a great deal about it," she said. "The premier couldn't have made a better choice."

Pascal has been actively involved in the child-care file through the Atkinson foundation's funding of First Duty programs that integrate child care, parenting centres and kindergarten in Toronto schools. He will continue with the foundation on a part-time basis while advising the premier.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

full-day early learning ^[4]

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