

Full-day kindergarten a start but after-school care needed [CA-ON]^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Moving to full-day kindergarten for all Ontario four- and five-year-old children would indeed be an enormous advance. Such a program -- I suggest including three year olds too -- is the norm in much of Europe and increasingly commonplace elsewhere.

The Liberal proposal would go a long way toward meeting a main recommendation from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) review of Canadian early childhood education and care: "The aim is to ... deliver care and education as one seamless program for young children ... Greater integration of kindergarten and child care would bring real advantages in the Canadian context."

There are two important features that could make such a program truly optimal for children and families.

First, 75 per cent of mothers are employed. Therefore, after-school child care remains a pressing issue.

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Second, the content of early childhood programs as children experience them is critical. Education experts note that early childhood education and care programs in some school systems tend to pursue preparation for formal schooling as the principal goal.

But best practice in early childhood education and care -- exemplified in Sweden and northern Italy -- takes a more holistic approach to education for young children by emphasizing a wider range of social, cognitive, emotional and societal goals -- and play-based ways of achieving them.

If the Liberal plan becomes a reality -- and the quicker the better -- close attention to these two things could help Ontario reclaim a leadership role in Canadian early childhood programs once again.

- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

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