

Needless delays on child care plan [CA-ON]^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

The much-anticipated Ontario day-care plan unveiled Thursday by the Liberal government was a far cry from what many parents were waiting to hear. They were hoping for a big leap forward, to hear that Ontario was planning to follow Quebec's lead by implementing an ambitious and daring child-care policy that would cover every child from cradle to Grade 1.

Instead, what they got was another election-style promise.

Children's Minister Marie Bountrogianni pledged the government will carry through on its 2003 election promise to act on the child-care front, starting with all-day programs for kindergarten children and moving eventually to providing day care to every child aged 2 1/2 and over.

Sadly, the Liberal plan will take up to 15 years to implement — a ridiculously long time that in reality means a child born this weekend will likely see little, if any, benefit. What is to cheer in that?

Under the plan, the province will work with school boards to provide half-day child care for 4- and 5-year-olds in junior and senior kindergarten. As Bountrogianni envisages the plan, children would still continue to attend half-day kindergarten. But rather than get on a bus, or wait for a parent to pick them up, they would spend the rest of their day in a child-care program in the same school. Eventually the plan would be extended to all children beginning at the age of 2 1/2 and up.

Bountrogianni hopes 50,000 new child-care spots will be available by late 2007, which is the end of the Liberal government mandate. But the kindergarten program will start in the fall of 2005 with just three pilot projects — one in a downtown setting, one urban and one rural.

At that rate, Ontario will be decades behind Quebec, which started phasing in its gutsy child care program in 1997. Although Quebec's \$7 a day child care for preschoolers is the best known element, its policy actually goes further. It includes all-day kindergarten, as well as requiring junior schools to offer before- and after-school care, most also charging \$7 a day.

While it is encouraging that Ontario is making any commitment to early childhood development, the province must implement the programs much faster. It does not need to set up pilot projects to test the all-day approach for kindergarten students. There is already enough evidence from around the world showing such programs are invaluable for children.

Ontario expects to get \$400 million in the coming months as the first instalment of the \$5 billion Ottawa will give the provinces over the next five years for an early childhood program. Surely Queen's Park could give that money to school boards or community groups to start setting up some kindergarten programs right away.

Clearly, \$400 million is not enough to help every child now in kindergarten. But it could help thousands. So why the holdup?

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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Quebec^[3]

Ontario^[4]

Tags: affordability^[5]

funding^[6]

kindergarten^[7]

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integration^[9]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/11/needless-delays-child-care-plan-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864>
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