

Quebec-style day care urged [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ontario should use new federal day-care money to begin building a Quebec-style child-care system for all children under 12, advocates say.

And they also want full-day kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds to be phased in over the next two years.

Under a plan to be unveiled today, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care wants schools to take full responsibility for children between 4 and 12, including after-hours, professional development days, March break and summer holidays. Programs outside school hours would be offered at a flat rate similar to Quebec's \$7-a-day fee. New six-hour, full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs would be free to parents.

All children aged 3 and under would be offered early learning and care through non-profit community-based programs run by parent boards and available to families at similar rates starting in the third year of the coalition's proposed 10-year-scheme. Work to build these so-called "community hubs" would begin immediately.

The coalition wants Ontario to draft a plan that includes all of the province's nearly 2 million children — including those aged 6 to 12 who may need care outside school hours. More than 1.3 million children under 12 in Ontario have mothers in the paid workforce. Just 9 per cent have access to regulated care.

It might take 10 years for the province to provide programs for all children in every part of the province whether parents are working, studying or involved in other activities, the coalition says. But within five years, child care for all age groups should be available under the new flat-fee system, as was the case in Quebec, the coalition says.

The coalition chose to start with kindergarten because it is already a public service that is relatively well funded and managed, says the coalition's plan entitled *To Boldly Go...*

While the new universal program is being phased in, the coalition calls for the immediate removal of subsidy restrictions for student parents receiving government loans, families with RRSPs and RESPs over \$5,000 and parents looking for work.

It also calls for schools to offer space for non-profit child care at no charge, for child-care centres to be built in all new schools and for Queen's Park to boost pay equity and provincial wage grants for child-care staff.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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